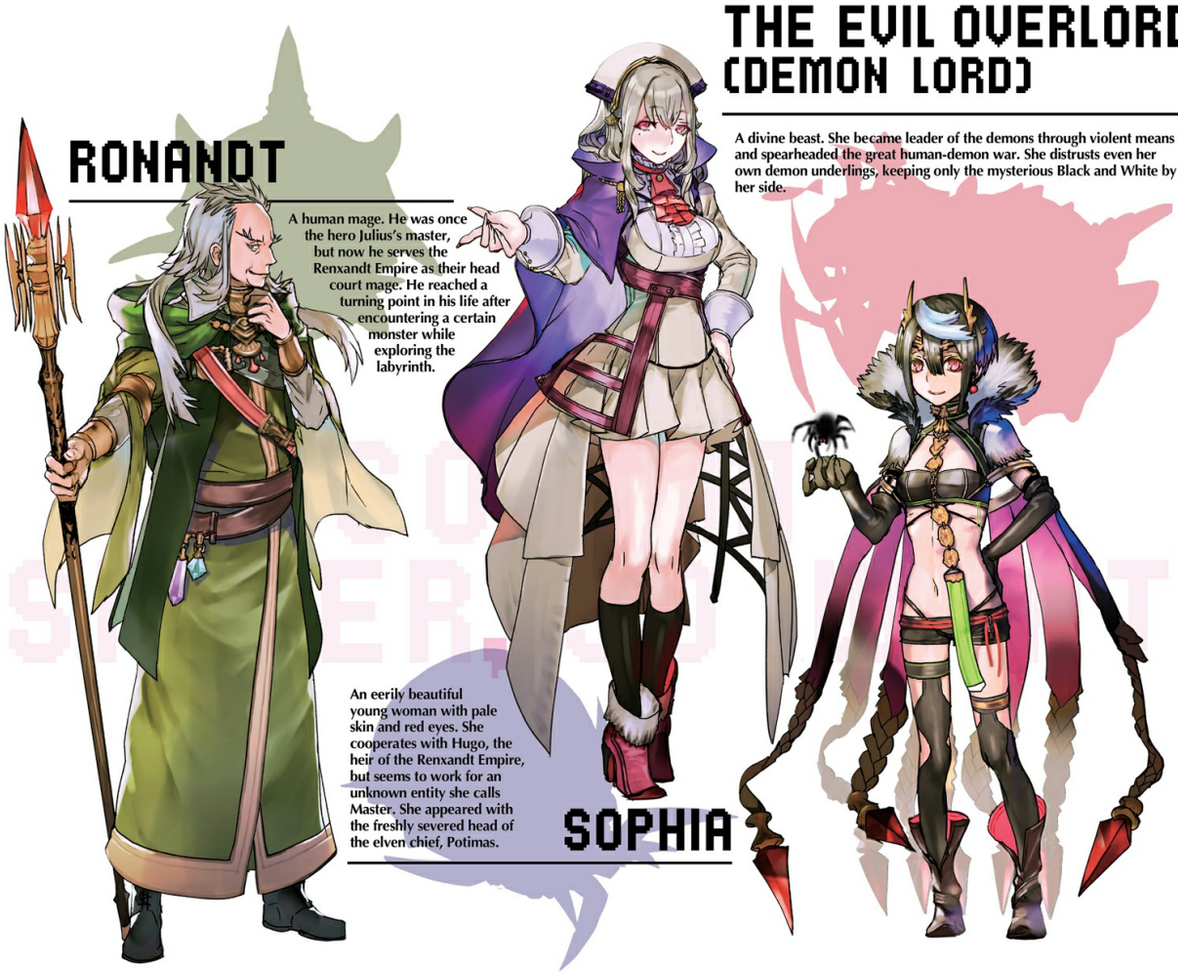

So I'm a Spider, So What?
OKINA BABA
Illustration by
TSUKASA KIRYU
4



RONANDT

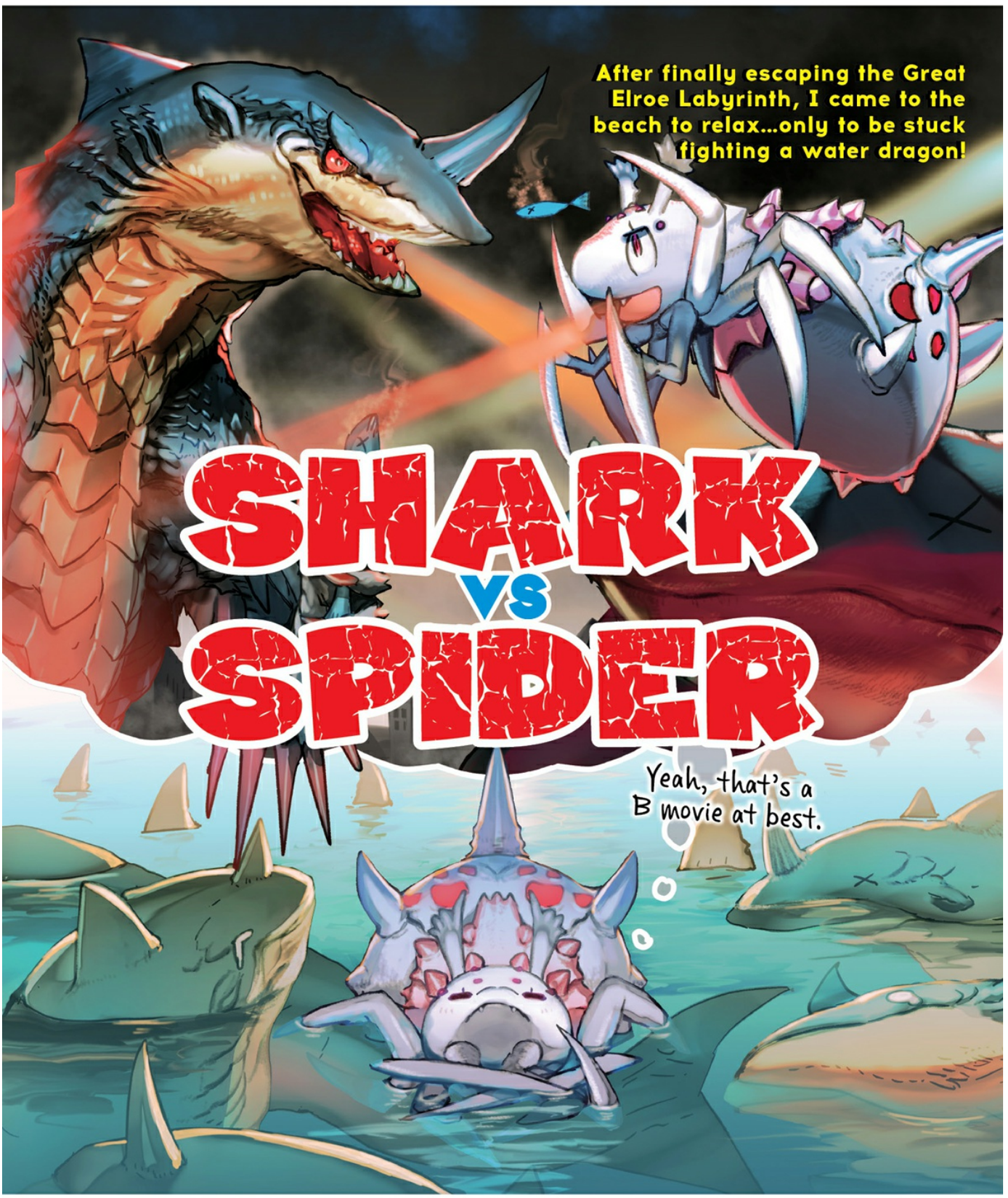
A human mage. He was once the hero Julius's master, but now he serves the Renxandt Empire as their head court mage. He reached a turning point in his life after encountering a certain monster while exploring the labyrinth.

THE EVIL OVERLORD (DEMON LORD)

A divine beast. She became leader of the demons through violent means and spearheaded the great human-demon war. She distrusts even her own demon underlings, keeping only the mysterious Black and White by her side.

SOPHIA

An eerily beautiful young woman with pale skin and red eyes. She cooperates with Hugo, the heir of the Renxandt Empire, but seems to work for an unknown entity she calls Master. She appeared with the freshly severed head of the elven chief, Potimas.


After finally escaping the Great Elroe Labyrinth, I came to the beach to relax...only to be stuck fighting a water dragon!
SHARK
VS
SPIDER
Yeah, that's a B movie at best.



So I'm a Spider, So What? 4

OKINA BABA
Illustration by
TSUKASA KIRYU



YEN ON
New York

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So I’m a Spider, So What?, Vol. 4

Okina Baba

Translation by Jenny McKeon Cover art by Tsukasa Kiryu

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KUMO DESUGA, NANIKA? Vol. 4

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First published in Japan in 2016 by KADOKAWA CORPORATION, Tokyo.

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First Yen On Edition: November 2018

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Names: Baba, Okina, author. | Kiryu, Tsukasa, illustrator. | McKeon, Jenny, translator.

Title: So I'm a spider, so what? / Okina Baba ; illustration by Tsukasa Kiryu ; translation by Jenny McKeon.

Other titles: Kumo desuga nanika. English | So I am a spider, so what?

Description: First Yen On edition. | New York, NY : Yen On, 2017–
Identifiers: LCCN 2017034911 | ISBN 9780316412896 (v. 1 : pbk.) | ISBN 9780316442886 (v. 2 : pbk.) | ISBN 9780316442909 (v. 3 : pbk.) | ISBN 9780316442916 (v. 4 : pbk.) Subjects: | CYAC: Magic—Fiction. | Spiders—Fiction. | Monsters—Fiction. | Prisons—Fiction. | Escapes—Fiction. | Fantasy.

Classification: LCC PZ7.1.O44 So 2017 | DDC [Fic]—dc23

LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2017034911

ISBNs: 978-0-31644291-6 (paperback) 978-0-316-44295-4 (ebook)

E3-20181026-JV-PC


Class Register
Homeroom Teacher: Kanami Okazaki
(Filimes)
Boys
Ren Aikawa
Kanata Ooshima
(Katia)
Kenichi Ogiwara
Shinobu Kusama
Naofumi Kogure
Issei Sakurazaki
Kyouya Sasajima
Kunihiko Tagawa
Dai Tsushima
Kengo Natsume
(Hugo)
Kouta Hayashi
Maki Shouwato
Shunsuke Yamada
(Me)
Girls
Aiko Iijima
Mirei Shinohara
(Fei)
Asaka Kushitani
Sachi Kudo
Shuuko Segawa
Saki Temarikawa
Himiko Tonooka
Chie Nanase
Shouko Negishi
Yuika Hasebe
(Yuri)
Mio Furuta
Hiiro Wakaba



1 Clear Blue Sky

Looking up, I see not the familiar ceiling of the labyrinth but an endless blue sky.

When I lower my eyes, instead of colorless rock walls, there's only colorful scenery.

Well, it's a little hazy right now, but still.

Yeah, the cloud of dust hanging over me makes it a little hard to see everything clearly.

Still, I never knew the world could be so rich with color.

I feel like I could switch jobs and become a poet right now.

I'm not talking the embarrassing kind of stuff most teenagers write. I mean real, beautiful poetry!

Just so we're clear, I'm not actually gonna do it, but I definitely could if I wanted to.

Look, you'll have to forgive me if I'm acting a little hyper right now.

But come on, I finally, finally, and let me say it one more time, fiiiiinally— —made it out of the Great Elroe Labyrinth!

That seriously took a while.

Since there's no difference between day and night in the labyrinth, I don't know exactly how long it's been since I was born in there.

But one thing's for sure: It's been ages.

I mean, I've been living in that labyrinth since I was first reincarnated.

I'd call that a long time, wouldn't you?

Long enough for me to come near death more times than I care to count. They should make an epic about my amazing spider life.

Man, for real.

The Great Elroe Labyrinth is the biggest labyrinth in the world, right?

Isn't that place a bit too intense to toss a weak little spider monster into without any kind of warning?

I mean, the very first thing I saw in my new life was my spider-monster siblings all killing and eating one another right before my eyes. Yikes.

And our own parent was taking part in the carnage!

Mother is scary.

After that, I struggled with all kinds of monsters in the labyrinth, got chased around, and had my home destroyed by humans before finally fighting the kind of dragon you'd expect to find in the last dungeon of a game.

Oh, but I guess in terms of scale, the Great Elroe Labyrinth actually would be the last dungeon here.

Still, it's because of that harsh environment that I became the spider I am today.

Those hellish days are what made me strong.

Yep. In fact, I might be even stronger than I thought.

Oh, right. At this very moment, directly in front of me are the dusty, crumbling remains of a fortress.

It was a puny one to begin with, just big enough to hinder the passage of monsters.

I guess it makes sense that people would want to take certain measures to prevent monsters from exiting the world's largest labyrinth.

This isn't a game, after all, so there's no guarantee that monsters won't leave their dungeons.

Anyway, as soon as I escaped the labyrinth, the first thing I saw was a wall blocking my path.

If monsters came out of the labyrinth, they'd be trapped by this wall, and the soldiers stationed there would take care of them.

That was probably the idea, anyway.

I assume the plan was something like that, since while I was staring up at the wall like an idiot, some soldiers attacked me.

I instinctively reacted by setting off a ton of magic, and, well, here we are.

Some arrows flew at me, too, so when I dodged 'em, I reflexively shot some Black Bullets at the archers, y'know?

With just that, the archers and the fortress all came down in pieces! *Boom!*

Oops!

Well, time to play dumb.

I have no idea what happened here.

The fortress just collapsed in some mysterious freak incident. It had nothing to do with me.

The only other witnesses have passed on to the next life by now, making it the perfect crime. The statute of limitations'll be long over before you get any proof!

Smell ya later, suckers!

I flee the sce— I mean, I leave the collapsed fortress behind, trying to stay out of sight.

I am a spider monster, after all.

If any humans catch a glimpse of me, it ain't gonna end well.

Especially since I'm the culpr— Ahem, I mean, since I'm this close to the area where that mysterious incident occurred.

Ugh, how could anyone do something so awful?!

I could easily be mistaken for the culprit!

I’m innocent, I tell you!

Okay, self-suggestion complete.

Even a lie detector won’t catch me now.

Seriously, though, because I look like a spider and all, of course I don’t want any humans to see me.

I have major doubts that there are any weirdos out there who would look at my body and think, Hey, a new friend!

Sure, it might be possible to find one or two people like that after searching the whole world over. But I’m guessing most humans would react in one of three ways: run, fight, or freeze in terror.

In my case, the Intimidation skill and Fearbringer title do a solid job inducing primal fear in anyone who lays eyes on me, so even the purest child probably wouldn’t act friendly.

A little boy who loves giant insects with all his heart would still probably run away screaming and crying.

Why do so many boys like beetles and stuff anyway? I don’t get it.

If a bug-loving boy wound up in the same situation as me, would he cry tears of joy?

Yeaaah, no way.

Just picturing that creeps me out a little.

Actually, it goes past that and straight to gross.

If someone like that really exists, I’ll be happy to let him take my place.

He’d probably die within a few days of being born.

If anything, he’d probably die right away.

Because Mother would eat him.

Of all the dangerous creatures I’ve seen in my life as a spider, the scariest of all is Mother, who I encountered moments after being born.

This is life on hard mode. With no continues.

And I’m still documenting it all in the present tense.

That’s pretty amazing, if I do say so myself.

Anyway, speaking of Mother, I’m currently locked in a rather unusual battle with her.

Now that I’ve defeated the earth dragon Araba, the only thing left for me to accomplish in the Great Elroe Labyrinth is to overthrow Mother.

If I can defeat my mother, who as far as I know is the strongest monster in the labyrinth, then I’ll be the head honcho of the labyrinth, in both name and reality.

As long as my ultimate goal is to become an administrator, then it’s probably inevitable that I’ll have to defeat Mother first.

I bet I’ll get a crapton of EXP if I beat her, for one thing.

But I don’t think I could defeat her if I took her head-on.

I mean, even the arch taratects, which are one step below Mother, had stats on par with Araba’s.

I was able to defeat them by teleporting them with me into the Middle Stratum, a total hellscape for the spiders that are naturally weak to heat, but it would’ve been a much tougher battle if I didn’t use such a dirty tactic.

And since Mother is even stronger than those guys, I seriously doubt I can beat her in a fair fight.

If I can’t win a fair fight, why not just make it an unfair one?

That’s why I’m currently in the middle of waging an unusual attack on Mother.

I guess it’s like a super-long-range strike?

If I had to make an analogy, I’d compare this fight to a battle between a gunman and a swordsman.

The gunman wins if he can keep his distance.

The swordsman wins if he can close that distance.

I don’t know what Mother’s stats are exactly, but they’re definitely higher than mine.

If it comes down to a face-to-face fight, I’ll definitely lose.

But as long as I can keep my distance from her, I have a chance at victory.

And at this point, I’d say my victory is all but guaranteed.

’Cause I’m outside the Great Elroe Labyrinth now.

An enormous creature like Mother would never be able to get out of the labyrinth.

I mean, the exit I emerged from not long ago is way too small for her to pass through.

In fact, at her size, her movements are pretty limited even within the labyrinth.

She could probably get around well enough in the spacious parts of the Lower or Middle Stratum, say, but the Upper Stratum has way too many narrow passages for her to move freely.

That’s exactly why I made my base in the Upper Stratum.

So that Mother couldn’t come attack me.

The fact that she sent that spider army with the archs and stuff after me just proves that she couldn’t get to me herself.

My victory was ensured as soon as I wiped out her troops.

Now that I’m free from the Great Elroe Labyrinth, Mother has no way of chasing me down.

I just have to wait until she can’t withstand my attacks any longer.

Of course, I’ll do some sightseeing in the meantime.

Well, then.

Now that I’ve accomplished one of my biggest goals in life, escaping the Great Elroe Labyrinth…what do I do next?

In the beginning, the idea behind escaping the labyrinth was basically to get

away from the tons of dangerous monsters that live there.

But if you really think about it, there's a new threat out here in the form of humans. I don't know if they're any less dangerous.

Somewhere along the way, my goal shifted from "getting out of danger" to "wanting good food."

I mean, all I had to eat in that stupid labyrinth were monsters!

And most of them were super-freaking-gross, too!

Come on! It's only natural to want to eat delicious food after all that, right?!

However, considering my (literally) monstrous appearance, I'd get exterminated as soon as I set foot in a human settlement.

On second thought, considering how easily I brought down that fortress back there, I don't know if they'd actually be able to defeat me that easily.

I could certainly try to sneak into town burglar-style, eat a bunch of food, and run away, but I'm not eager to try something that risky.

Better stick with my original plan of staying away from humans until I can finally evolve into an arachne.

See, an arachne is a monster with the lower body of a spider and the upper body of a human.

I'd still be a monster, but my upper half would be humanoid, meaning I'd certainly look more like a person than I do now.

With a human upper half, I could probably talk, too, meaning I might be able to communicate and even establish friendly relations with humans.

However, the path to becoming an arachne is long and far away. Besides, I don't even know the language of this world, so I wouldn't be able to communicate my intentions.

Either way, I can't make contact with humans just yet.

For the moment, I'll have to get a hold of tasty food on my own somehow.

I use Dimensional Maneuvering to launch myself high into the air before taking a look around.

Not far ahead of me is a human town.

The buildings have that vaguely medieval European feeling you often see in fantasy settings.

At a glance, I don't see any machinery or anything.

As I suspected from my encounters with humans in the labyrinth, this civilization doesn't seem terribly advanced.

Anyway, I'm just gonna ignore this town.

I'm sure no good would come of trying to enter it.

To the left are some plains.

To the right are some more plains.

Beyond the plains is a forest, then eventually some mountains.

Since the Great Elroe Labyrinth links two continents, I kinda thought it'd let out near an ocean for some reason, but the exit I used seems to be pretty far inland.

Hmm.

Forests and mountains, huh?

I bet there are all kinds of nature's bounties in there. I guess I'll check it out.

Maybe there are fruits and mushrooms and stuff.

Most of the monsters in the labyrinth were disgusting, but maybe wild animals in the mountains will be tastier.

Besides, I'm kinda curious about what's beyond the mountains.

If there's an ocean there, I might be able to get a hold of some seafood.

Considering how delicious the eels and catfish were in the Middle Stratum, I bet genuine sea creatures would taste even better.

Well, no use just hanging around.

Let's get going!



To the Great Elroe Labyrinth

We’re traveling toward the elf village to stop Hugo.

He’s plunged the country into chaos using the power of brainwashing, seizing control over both the church and the empire.

My older brother Leston’s informants discovered that Hugo is currently leading the empire’s huge army toward the elf village, despite the fact that a war against demons has just begun.

If we let him run wild like this, it’s obvious that the demons will take advantage of the resulting confusion.

We have to stop him, no matter what.

However, the elf village is on Kasanagara, so we have to get there from Daztrudia.

There are two ways to travel between the continents.

You can either use a teleport point or cross through the Great Elroe Labyrinth.

The ocean isn’t an option: It’s the domain of powerful water dragons. Any ships that try to cross come under attack and sink immediately.

Unfortunately, Fei can’t fly long enough to take us across by air, either.

A teleport point would be safest, but since those are highly valuable magic tools, every major nation exerts direct control over any in their regions.

Since we’re wanted by our kingdom, and probably the church as well, I doubt any other nations would give us permission to use their teleport points.

The only remote possibility is the kingdom where my older sister, whom I’ve never met, married into the royal family.

However, it would be too dangerous to rely on others for help when we don't know how far Hugo's influence reaches.

Our best bet is to work only with the people we know we can trust, meaning the current members of our small band.

In which case, a teleport point isn't an option.

The only remaining option is to traverse the Great Elroe Labyrinth.

However, as its name implies, it's an enormous dungeon where monsters abound.

Monsters that have evolved independently, closed off from the rest of the world.

Many of them are poisonous, making countermeasures a must.

Not to mention that the labyrinth itself is dangerous all on its own.

It's said that the Great Elroe Labyrinth is so incredibly large that you'll never make it back alive if you lose your way even once.

Because of that, anyone who wants to cross the labyrinth needs to hire a specialized labyrinth guide.

At least, that's what I've gathered about the place so far.

Unlike a teleport point, traversing the Great Elroe Labyrinth is dangerous, not to mention time-consuming.

Fortunately, we still have a little time to spare.

The empire is a long distance from the elf village, and since a large army is weighing Hugo down, it'll take that much longer for him to travel anywhere.

Calculating back from the information we were given, it should take the empire's army longer to reach the village than it will take us to get through the labyrinth.

The problem is that the Great Elroe Labyrinth is an unspeakably dangerous place.

Out of our group, the only two people who have entered it before are Hyrince and Anna.

When our teacher first came to this continent with Potimas, the friendship ambassador of the elves, they used the teleport point in our kingdom.

Hugo has since destroyed that teleport point.

Hyrince mentioned that he went into the labyrinth with my brother Julius on a few occasions long ago, for monster extermination and other duties.

Anna entered only once, to travel through it.

Katia, Fei, and I have never even left the kingdom. This will be our first time in the labyrinth, of course.

Unlike the places we visited for exercises at the academy, our lives will truly be in danger here.

All in all, having to face the labyrinth is a little nerve-racking.

We rode on Fei's back and flew through the sky before finally arriving here, the entrance to the Great Elroe Labyrinth.

"I knew it. Empire soldiers."

Activating Clairvoyance, I scope out the entrance from a long distance.

It's surrounded by a fortress that seals it off.

The Great Elroe Labyrinth is the only land route that connects the continents.

If demons want to attack this continent, they'll have to come through here.

The fortress serves as a breakwater for that, but demons have never come through the Great Elroe Labyrinth.

A maze so enormous that it would be impossible to ever escape it without a guide.

Full of dangerous, poisonous monsters.

The Great Elroe Labyrinth is like a natural fortress in its own right, the most impregnable citadel.

At any rate, demons have never used it as a route to attack humans, historically speaking.

The main role of the fortress is to prevent people from trespassing into the

labyrinth illegally and to make sure that no monsters escape.

There wouldn't normally be any empire soldiers around the entrance, though.

This isn't part of the empire's territory.

Without a doubt, this is Hugo's work.

He must have set up guards here to make sure we can't simply cross the continental border.

"What should we do?"

"Can we use Stealth and other techniques to evade the soldiers, perhaps?"

Ms. Oka offers a suggestion.

But I shake my head.

There certainly are skills for concealing one's presence, but they won't work on someone with stronger perception skills.

That old mage Ronandt is a perfect example.

He was able to sense us even though we were far above him, actively hiding our presence.

Even if there's no one that powerful here, there could still be someone with strong perception skills.

And if they detected us, a fight would be inevitable.

Since we still have to fight our way through the extremely challenging Great Elroe Labyrinth, we should avoid combat whenever possible to save our strength.

So forcing our way through is out of the question.

"I have an idea. Follow me."

Hyrince beckons to the rest of the group.

Since he has more experience with the Great Elroe Labyrinth than any of us do, he might have a better plan.

We follow his lead, moving away from the entrance.

“We’re here.”

Hyrince led us to a small village not far from the labyrinth entrance.

As he explained along the way, the village is made up of people who run businesses, inns, and other services for adventurers planning on entering the labyrinth.

Sure enough, the stores seem to stock shatterproof antidote potions, live coals, and so on. The inns are much larger than one would expect from such a small settlement, too.

This must be where people make their final preparations before braving the great labyrinth.

We travel along the outside perimeter, taking care not to be seen.

After all, there’s no telling whether Hugo has eyes in this village.

Fei, of course, is hiding out nearby so she doesn’t draw attention.

A giant wyrm like that is bound to be spotted as soon as she enters the village, after all.

Sneaking along, we arrive at a single isolated house on the outskirts of the village.

It’s a bit larger than most of the other houses.

Hyrince knocks on the door.

“Yes? Who is it?”

A middle-aged man appears from inside.

His powerful muscles, visible even through his clothes, hint that this is no ordinary villager.

Seeing Hyrince at the door, the man looks surprised.

“It’s been a long time, friend.”

Hyrince lowers his head after offering a greeting.

“Indeed. Well, do come in.”

The man peers around cautiously before ushering us inside.

That must mean that he has some knowledge of our situation.

“This is Mr. Goyef, a labyrinth guide. He aided Julius, the others, and me countless times.”

“Indeed. My name is Goyef. It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

“Mr. Goyef, this is Julius’s brother Schlain.”

“Hello, I’m Schlain. It’s nice to meet you.”

Hyrince introduces the rest of the group in turn.

Mr. Goyef listens to it all with a mild-mannered smile, but he doesn’t seem like someone to be taken lightly.

From what I can tell through his clothes, his body seems very well trained, and though he wears a meek expression, it looks to me as though he’s sizing us up with narrowed eyes.

That would explain why Hyrince is speaking rather politely to him, too.

Clearly, there’s something out of the ordinary about this man.

“Now then, Mr. Goyef. Allow me to be frank about our situation. The empire is currently pursuing us on false charges. To settle this matter, we wish to cross through the Great Elroe Labyrinth into Kasanagara. However, empire soldiers are guarding the entrance. Is there any chance that you might have an alternative way to get us into the labyrinth, Mr. Goyef?”

Mr. Goyef ponders in silence for a moment.

“I understand your circumstances, to some extent. I did find it strange when I heard rumors that you had attempted to overthrow the king, Sir Hyrince.”

Apparently, Mr. Goyef already knew a bit about what had happened in the capital.

As part of their job, labyrinth guides tend to have a wide range of connections.

He must have gathered information through this network.

It seems that he was even able to guess that we were being falsely accused based on what he found out.

“Unfortunately, I cannot help you.”

Upon hearing those words, Hyrince’s face falls.

“Mr. Goyef…”

“I am truly sorry. But my own life and safety hang in the balance as well. I cannot afford to draw the empire’s attention by aiding you. My personal safety is one thing, but it could potentially put my family in danger as well.”

“I see…”

Though they aren’t present at the moment, I do see a few signs that children live in this house.

Mr. Goyef has a family.

We can’t ask him to endanger that family to aid us.

I know this, but it’s still a painful reminder that the false label of “traitor” we carry is a heavy burden.

If anything, we should be grateful that he was willing to hear us out.

At worst, he could easily have drawn a weapon on us as soon as we appeared at his doorstep.

Even knowing that we’re innocent, no one would want to make an enemy of an entire empire.

“What’s this now? If this coward won’t guide yeh, I’ll do it my damn self.”

An elderly man kicks open the door with an announcement that startles our gloomy group.

“Father?!”

“Hrmph! I don’t recall raising a coward. A man yer age, afraid of some stupid empire?”

With a bottle of liquor in hand, the man swaggers over.

“The name’s Basgath. If it’s all right by you, I’d gladly guide yeh in this coward’s place.”

“Father, wait!”

“Quiet, you.”

The man’s soft yet powerful voice cows Mr. Goyef into silence.

Even at a glance, Basgath seems incredibly fit for an old man and in possession of an intense spirit.

His strength is so evident that I’m tempted to Appraise his status without thinking.

“Yer too scared of the empire to do yer job? The monsters that lurk in the deeps of the labyrinth are far worse than any empire. Labyrinth guides ought to fear no man, only the labyrinth itself. Don’t yeh know that?”

Basgath scowls at Goyef.

It sounds crazy to me, but Mr. Goyef seems unable to stop him.

“Surely yeh aren’t really satisfied letting proceedings go like this, are yeh? Then let me do it. Even if the empire does take notice, yeh can just say that yer senile old man did it of his own accord.”

“Father…”

Basgath’s insistence quickly drains Goyef’s drive to argue.

Goyef must have his own misgivings about the way the empire has been doing things.

“If yeh don’t mind a retired old gramps like me, I’ll guide yeh. What’ll it be?”

Hyrince hesitates, but my instincts tell me we can count on this person.

I communicate my thoughts to him briefly with Telepathy.

At the same time, I notice a slight reaction from Mr. Basgath.

Apparently, this person can eavesdrop on Telepathy.

“All right. Thank you.”

“Sure thing. Well, not that I can do all that much anyway.”

Yeah, right.

Even in this short amount of time, it’d be obvious to anyone that Mr. Basgath is a pretty big deal.

“Let’s discuss the specifics, then.”

At Hyrince’s proposal, we begin to plan our next moves in detail.

Apparently giving in, Mr. Goyef helps with our plans as well.

I use Telepathy to tell Fei that our negotiations with Basgath were a success.

Then, for some reason, she tells me to switch with Ms. Oka instead.

“Ms. Oka, Fei says she wants to talk to you.”

“Oh? I wonder why.”

Taking over the Telepathy conversation, our teacher talks to Fei for a moment, then tells us that she’s going out and leaves, just like that.

I try to insist on going with her just to be safe, but for whatever reason, she won’t allow it.

Instead, the other women, Katia and Anna, go with her, leaving only the guys behind in Mr. Goyef’s house.

“Women and children are strong these days. Those girls seem pretty skilled, too, eh?”

Basgath is a straight shooter, apparently.

“It’s impolite to ask about other people’s abilities, isn’t it?”

That’s what I was taught, anyway.

It’s the reason why I’m careful not to use Appraisal too often, even though I leveled it up to the max by diligently building up proficiency.

“Normally, sure. But we labyrinth guides need to have a sense of how strong the people we’re guiding might be. In the labyrinth, yeh may well live or die by a guide’s judgment. Manners got no place in a job like mine.”

Basgath shrugs.

“That’s why even without using Appraisal, I can usually tell just about how strong someone might be. Not that I’d bet the farm on my accuracy!”

He chuckles at his own joke and takes a swig of alcohol.

“Yeh all do seem to be a capable lot. But in the labyrinth, even capable

humans can die just like that. Don’t let yer guards down.”

Maybe he’s trying to warn us not to get too confident just because we think we’re strong?

Just to be safe, I nod cautiously.

It’s not like I’m in any danger of being overly sure of myself right now.

To be honest, I’ve completely lost my confidence.

Even after becoming the hero, I haven’t been able to do anything when the time calls for it.

I couldn’t land a single blow on Hugo, all I could do against Sophia was run for my life, and Ronandt let me live out of pity.

My stats are quite high.

But some of our enemies are far stronger.

As I am now, I don’t stand a chance against them.

I’ve got no room for overconfidence right now.

I know I have to get much, much stronger.

“Ah, youth…”

Evidently grasping some portion of my inner turmoil, Basgath gives me a warm look.

I hastily turn my face away to avoid his gaze.

“We’re back.”

Ms. Oka and the girls return just in time.

Hmm? Wait…

Ms. Oka came back with Katia, Anna, and…one more person?

“Ta-daa! Introducing the brand-new human model Fei, just released today!”

The new person introduces herself brightly, even striking a goofy pose.

She practically looks like an angel: pale skin, hair white enough it almost glimmers, and feathery wings to complete the look.

But what surprises me most is actually her face.

She looks just like my old classmate, who I haven't seen in so long: Mirei Shinohara, Fei's previous incarnation.

"Fei…? Is that you?"

I was already pretty sure from her face, not to mention that she'd already introduced herself, but I still couldn't help asking.

"You know it! I got the Light Wyrm skill when I evolved, and guess what turned out to be one of its effects? Humanification!"

She's probably all excited because it's the first time since reincarnating that she's been able to look like a human again.

There are still some traces of her dragon form, like the scales on her exposed arms and the feathers dotting her body, but she definitely resembles a human a lot more now.

I can only imagine how she felt being reborn as a dragon, but seeing how energetic she is now, it's obvious that she's pretty pleased with this turn of events.

Basgath and Goyef, who have no idea what's going on, are staring blankly, but hopefully they'll let her do her thing for a bit.

I don't recognize the clothing that Fei is wearing.

Ms. Oka probably bought it all in a hurry at one of the village shops.

That explains why she wouldn't let me come with her.

Well, it's not like Fei wears any clothes in dragon form. There's no reason she'd conveniently have clothes on when she turns into a human.

Which means that when she first turned into a human, she must've been na… k…e…

"And what might you be thinking about, hmm?"

The alarming darkness in Katia's voice quickly drives that line of thought out of my mind.

Privately, I assure myself that I had only the purest intentions.

“Wait, so I wasn’t allowed to come but Katia was?”

Technically, Katia used to be male.

“Of course it was fine for me to go.”

I see.

“But seriously, you look pretty good like that.”

“I know, right?! Look at me—I’m sparkling! Heeey, pretty lady!”

Picking up on my muttered comment, Fei twirls around.

In her previous life as Mirei Shinohara, Fei was beautiful enough that she got away with singing her own praises.

It was that same pride that led her to bully Wakaba, unable to stand another girl getting more compliments than she did.

With her feathered wings and almost half-dragon, half-human appearance, Fei is juuust treading the line of resembling a cosplayer, but when combined with her beautiful face, it looks perfectly natural.

Add in her avian light-wyrm feathers, and she really does look like an angel.

Her words and actions are far from angelic, though, so of course it’s still easy to tell that it’s just Fei.

More importantly, this means that Fei is no longer too big to enter the Great Elroe Labyrinth.

In dragon form, Fei’s enormous size makes it difficult for her to get around indoors.

Worst-case scenario, I was worried she wouldn’t be able to enter the labyrinth at all.

As a last resort, I can call her with Summoning, which was why I considered leaving her here.

She’d reassured me that it would be fine, so I trusted her, but still…I had no idea that this was the solution she had in mind.

At any rate, every last one of us can charge freely into the labyrinth now.



The Demon Lord's Aide Sighs at a Meeting Again

"Now, let's get this meeting started. Balto?"

"Indeed."

With the exact same wording that she used before the war, the Demon Lord begins the meeting.

However, the meeting's participants have changed since then.

Specifically, they've decreased in number.

There were originally ten seats…

But now three of them are vacant.

"Now, let us begin with status reports from each army. The First Army's leader, Commander Agner, has been killed in battle. The army itself also suffered catastrophic losses. We have since redistributed the survivors into other armies."

I flip through the document in my hands to relay more information about the First Army's current situation.

As it happens, this document also contains the reason for the First Army's demise.

However, I make no mention of that.

Everyone here already knows the reason, and the meaning behind it, too.

The First Army was destroyed in battle with the humans.

However, it was certainly not destroyed by human hands.

The First Army was attacking an important point: Fort Kusorion.

As the most geographically advantageous of the human side's fortresses, it was formidably built and garrisoned with forces to match.

Which is precisely why we sortied the best troops of the demon army to attack it.

At first, our forces seemed to be evenly matched.

The humans had the edge because they were able to fight from behind their fortifications, but under First Army Commander Agner's brilliant direction, our army was able to hold its own despite its smaller numbers.

However, the humans gradually began to gain the upper hand thanks to their advantageous position. Then, just as the First Army was beginning to consider retreating, it appeared.

The legendary-class monster, the living calamity: the queen taratect.

Within moments, the battlefield was transformed into the very picture of hell itself.

The queen taratect trampled demons and humans alike, landing devastating blows on both armies.

If anything, the humans likely suffered greater losses with the destruction of their fortress, but it was still nothing to celebrate.

The rumor among the humans is that the demons summoned the unruly queen in a desperate attempt to make a last-minute comeback.

But the truth is far darker than that.

Right from the beginning, that queen taratect was summoned with the intention of destroying both armies at once.

In order to get rid of First Army Commander Agner and his men in one fell swoop.

It was only when I was sorting through his belongings after the battle that I discovered evidence that he'd been secretly colluding with the elves.

For some reason, the Demon Lord had ordered me to take care of his things

personally.

Before long, I found plans that involved trying to avert the war with humans, account books documenting profits from contraband trade with the elves, and more damning evidence.

At that point, I realized why the Demon Lord had ordered me specifically to go through his belongings myself.

The Demon Lord knew that Agner had betrayed her and had been working with the elves.

Then, she saw to it that the queen taratect appeared without warning on the battlefield and just so happened to kill him.

But she was making no attempt to hide any of her involvement.

In fact, she made a point of guiding me to information that would lead me to that conclusion.

This could mean only one thing.

She's declaring that she has no intention of forgiving any traitors.

How could anyone rebel against a Demon Lord who can control legendary monsters as she pleases?

"Now then, a report from the Second Army, if you would."

"Of course."

After concluding my detailed report on the First Army, I turn things over to Second Army Commander Sanatoria.

"The Second Army is currently keeping watch from nearby Fort Okun to ensure that the anogratches do not leave the fortress. At present, no such incidents have occurred, and we have suffered no casualties."

Sanatoria reports smoothly.

Her army hadn't suffered a single loss in that battle.

That would be because she released monsters called anogratches into the fortress and let them lay waste to it.

Anogratches are a race of primate monsters that form huge swarms to seek revenge if a single one of their kin is killed.

More frightening still, they never stop attacking until either the murderer who killed one of their own is destroyed or the entire swarm is wiped out.

Sanatoria leveraged their instincts by sending in a single captured anogratch to be killed by one of the fortress's humans, inciting the rage of the rest of its brood.

Before long, a huge throng of anogratches overwhelmed the fortress, crushing the garrison easily.

The Second Army didn't even need to lift a finger.

In fact, because the anogratches remain in the fortress, the army can't afford to move at all.

If the anogratches start to migrate into demon territory, they're bound to cause damage.

The Second Army has to stay near Fort Okun to ensure that doesn't happen.

At least, that's the official story.

In truth, this is actually just an excuse for Sanatoria to keep her army close at hand.

Most of the other armies suffered major losses in the previous battle and are currently in the process of reorganizing, making the Second Army the only force still completely intact.

Of all the remaining armies, Sanatoria retains the one with the most power.

Power to oppose the Demon Lord.

"Say, how would you like to betray the Demon Lord and join me?"

The memory of Sanatoria's proposal to me comes unbidden to my mind.

"If we keep following that demon lord, eventually we'll only get used up until there's nothing left of us. But if we conspire with the elves to coordinate a surprise attack, we should be able to bring even her down."

After Agner's death, it seems that the elves forged a new contact with

Sanatoria.

With that, she inherited the flag of rebellion by joining hands with the elves.

In response to her invitation, I advised her to drop such foolish ideas immediately, and I turned away.

“Surely you must have some feelings about what happened with Bloe, no?”

I clenched my teeth at her parting words as I left.

As I listen now to the commanders’ reports, my eyes drift to the Seventh Army Commander’s seat.

A seat that is now empty.

Not long ago, my younger brother, Bloe, would have been sitting there.

But that will never happen again.

Bloe fought the hero head-to-head and lost.

Then, immediately afterward, Tenth Army Commander White defeated the hero.

Very easily, at that.

It’s clear to me, as it should be to anyone, that White deliberately let Bloe die.

She looked on silently as Bloe was killed, even though she had the power to slay the hero instantly.

As if she had been waiting for Bloe to die from the very beginning.

Undoubtedly, my younger brother was killed because the Demon Lord planned for it.

No one will ever understand the pain I felt the moment I realized that.

It felt as if something were boiling over in my stomach, yet I had no choice but to push that down and continue to serve the Demon Lord.

After all, no one in the world can stand against her.

Even if Sanatoria is preserving her army’s strength and colluding with the elves, none of that will mean a thing.

Because the Demon Lord has the power to destroy them all single-handedly.

And yet, certain parties with no understanding of the situation have somehow come to the conclusion that the Demon Lord is weak.

She has yet to fight in a single battle since she became the Demon Lord, leading to rumors that she may not be as strong as she seems. For some reason, a few of my fellows have fallen for it completely.

Sanatoria is one of them.

The reason that the Demon Lord hasn't been fighting directly isn't because she's weak.

No, it's because her strength is too great, turning any battle in which she participates into a one-sided massacre.

And the Demon Lord doesn't want that.

She wants the demons to fight and take as many lives as possible while they do it.

That's why she uses the armies instead of doing it herself, despite the fact that if she really wanted to, she could forgo everything else and trample her enemies entirely on her own.

On top of that, that very same Demon Lord has White at her disposal, who was able to kill a hero instantly.

Why would I ever pick a fight with someone like that?

To avenge my brother?

She did let him die, yes, but the hero is the one who actually struck him down.

I cannot resent the Demon Lord for that.

If I ever displease her, it would be tantamount to giving up on the fate of all demons.

In the end, I must swear my allegiance to the Demon Lord.

Compared to the fate of our entire race, my personal feelings are scarcely enough to tip the scales at all.

Sanatoria simply doesn't understand that.

"Next, the Third Army Commander, if you please."

My voice is cold as I address the Third Army Commander, Kogou.

This man is secretly working with Sanatoria.

Sanatoria tried to hide the fact that she was collaborating with him, but did she really think I wouldn't find out?

If so, she's more naive than I thought.

"Th-the Third Army's current status is, erm, as follows…"

Kogou stutters through his report.

His fighting abilities are quite high, but his intelligence is not much to speak of.

I'm sure Sanatoria simply sweet-talked him into cooperating with her.

Perhaps she even took advantage of his gentle personality and aversion to war.

Barely listening to his report, I look over at the seat of the Sixth Army Commander.

This seat, too, is vacant.

If he were alive, the seat's former occupant, Huey, would likely be working with Sanatoria as well.

While he was still around, Huey was very close with Sanatoria.

If he heard that Sanatoria was working with the elves, I have no doubt he would have joined her without hesitation.

He was a childish commander, both in looks and personality.

I heard that his army came up against forces led by Ronandt, said to be the strongest human mage alive, and was struck down by the magic of Ronandt himself.

To my knowledge, he's the only commander so far who lost purely to the strength of the human army and not because of the Demon Lord's

machinations.

Still, it's not as though Huey was particularly weaker than the other commanders.

Though he may have been a bit immature, his strength and intellect made him worthy of his position.

It was simply that Ronandt was even stronger and wiser.

Rather than speaking ill of Huey for losing, it would be wiser to commend Ronandt for winning.

Even if he did survive, considering that Sanatoria may have been using him, it's possible he was better off dying on the battlefield after losing to such a skilled opponent.

"The Tenth Army has finished reorganizing."

The short statement brings me back to reality.

White, the Tenth Army Commander, has given the final report.

She seems to have no inclination to give any further details, as she says no more after that brief sentence.

I have very little idea of the movements or composition of the Tenth Army.

Most likely, the Demon Lord gives her orders to White directly, using the army in her own particular way.

I look at White again.

Truly, there is no other way to describe her but "white."

She doesn't look like someone who could obliterate a hero effortlessly, but the Demon Lord herself is proof that appearances have no connection to strength.

This girl is the Demon Lord's ace in the hole, her greatest vassal.

"All right. Guess that wraps up the reports, huh? Let's get down to today's main topic, then."

Deciding that the reports have reached a good stopping point, the Demon

Lord clears her throat.

Unaware of the circumstances, most of the commanders seem surprised to hear the Demon Lord speak of her own accord.

In most meetings, she leaves everything to me and hardly speaks at all. They undoubtedly find this development suspicious.

“Basically, I’m going to take command of my army, the Fourth Army, the Eighth Army, and the Tenth Army to go destroy the elves now.”

This unexpected declaration shakes the commanders to their core.

No doubt Sanatoria and Third Army Commander Kogou are the most distressed by the news.

The two of them are secretly colluding with the elves, after all.

“Yeah, I’m kinda sick of them, so I figure it’s about time to have them disappear. Until we get back, the other armies are to reorganize and maintain security. And make sure the humans don’t try to attack us or anything. Got it?”

The Demon Lord’s tone is light as ever.

Sanatoria and Kogou must be panicking on the inside.

“Oh, but don’t think you can get an attack of opportunity on me while I’m busy with the enemy, ’kay? ’Cause that won’t work.”

As if to deal a final blow to their rebellion, the Demon Lord shoots off her last comment with a smile.

Sanatoria and Kogou turn visibly pale.

See? It’s exactly like I told you.

Don’t even try.

The Demon Lord outmatches all of us not only in raw power but in every way imaginable.

She’s monstrous in ways that we could never begin to measure.

There is no way to defeat her.

If that demon lord says she’s going to destroy something, it will surely be

destroyed beyond recognition.

The fate of the elves is already sealed.



Spirit Battle vs Mother

I am former magic brain number one.

Well, as soon as this big job is over, I'll go back to being magic brain, anyway.

But first I have to finish, you know, defeating Mother.

[Number one! Don't just stand there—work! Gyaaah?!]

Ah, the former body brain got blown away by one of Mother's attacks.

Whoop-de-do.

Oh, don't worry.

She's not gonna die.

The worst Mother can really do right now is knock us around a bit.

For one thing, we're not actually fighting in the real world.

I guess we're fighting Mother's soul or spirit or something? It's basically like fighting in a dream.

See, Mother has the Kin Control skill, which generally allows her to control any of her children.

And it was starting to affect our body, too.

I first noticed it when I was fighting the fire dragon.

For some reason, I felt like my own emotions were out of whack somehow.

Investigating the cause, I discovered that I was receiving something like a radio signal from Mother.

When you realize someone is pushing you, you push back, right?

That’s why I traced the signal that was meant to control me back to her, and now I’m waging a counterattack on Mother.

This is all done by sending in my Parallel Minds to fight as spiritual projections.

Parallel Minds is a skill that creates copies of my will.

Just think of it like a ninja cloning technique, except for your consciousness instead of your body.

I guess since there’s only one body, you could theoretically call it multiple personalities.

However, by giving each of these minds different roles, we’ve been able to do the work of several people with a single body.

Specifically, one mind (me) is in charge of magic, one is in charge of moving the body, one is in charge of gathering information, and so on.

Sort of like a tank with a driver, a commander, and a gunner.

One of these Parallel Minds was left in charge of the real body, and the rest were sent off to attack Mother.

By “the rest,” I mean us.

Mother’s giant figure is right before my eyes.

However, this is actually just a spirit form. It’s not her real body.

Mother’s spirit body has already lost a few of its legs.

Well, it’s because we ate them.

Even now, a few of my spirit clones are latched on to Mother’s body, gnawing away.

Mother is thrashing around, shaking them off or knocking them away.

But, as I keep explaining, these are spirit bodies, not our real physical one.

They’re like soul fragments, so to speak.

Moreover, our real body has Heresy Nullification, a skill that cancels out any attacks that would damage the soul.

In other words, no matter how many attacks Mother's spirit body hits us with, she can't hurt us because we *are* souls!

All things considered, this means we can charge at her without fear of death.

Mother who? Never heard of her!

I don't feel so much as an itch, even if she stomps me, bites me, or shoots me with magic.

I'm invincible, I tell you!

Even attacks that would probably kill me instantly in reality don't mean a thing here.

Although, due to how much stronger she is than me, it's taking us days just to wear her down.

Still, we're slowly but surely backing her into a corner.

If us Parallel Minds can defeat Mother's spiritual body, she'll die in real life, too.

These are still souls we're talking about, after all.

Can you really say a living thing is still alive if it loses its soul?

I'm betting that the life-preserving functions in her physical body will go when her soul goes.

Which would mean I've won.

If I can't win by fighting her in the flesh, why not bring the fight to the spiritual plane?

It's not psychological warfare—it's psychic warfare.

This is a key point.

My attacks are weak and don't do much, but hers don't do anything at all.

As long as I keep doing damage little by little, while she can't damage me at all, then my victory is assured.

On top of that, my real body has left the Great Elroe Labyrinth to embark on a journey in the outside world.

It’s impossible for Mother’s giant body to go there.

The moment I exited the labyrinth was the moment I won.

Now I just have to take my sweet time whittling away at Mother’s soul.

I never even dreamed that I’d be able to defeat such a powerful opponent like this.

I guess this is kinda like a dream, though.

【Number one! Are you still slacking off?!】

The former body brain comes back, complaining all the while.

Despite how violently Mother’s attack blew her away, she’s still totally unharmed.

Thank you, O Great Heresy Nullification.

Without that skill, I probably wouldn’t have had even the slimmest of chances.

Mother’s spiritual strength is basically on par with her real strength.

Which makes perfect sense.

The strength of her real stats is based on the strength of her soul, after all.

Sure, physical strength comes into play, too, but the soul is the main source of power. It’s not surprising that the spiritual body—essentially her soul itself—would be just as strong.

In other words, our spirit bodies are comparable in ability to our real bodies, too.

But in our case, we’ve been split into fragments by Parallel Minds, which means we each have only a certain percent of that strength.

The fact that this battle is still grueling despite the fact that Heresy Nullification negates any attacks against us just goes to show how enormous the difference in strength is between Mother and our real body.

We keep getting blown away, charging, and latching on again.

It’s only after repeating this cycle for days that we’ve finally reached the point

where we've caused visible damage.

【Hey, don't ignore me!】

Ugh, so annoying.

I haven't been slacking off, either, you know.

《Hey, former body brain.》

【What?】

《Doesn't it seem strange to you?》

I don't have to clarify what I'm referring to.

There's something strange about Mother's actions.

In this spiritual battle, as long as we have Heresy Nullification, we don't have to worry about getting hurt.

We know we'll defeat Mother eventually, even if it takes a long while.

It's obvious how this will end.

That being the case, of course Mother's going to try to foil our plans.

The first counter came in the form of an arch taratect–led spider army that she sent after our real body, which was in an area too small for her to enter herself.

Arch taratects are particularly powerful subordinates of hers, able to hold their own even against a dragon.

She probably thought that would be enough to kill our real body.

But instead, our real body turned the tables on them using some rather nasty tactics, beating them at their own game.

That was all well and good.

But it's what's happened since that's strange.

Since the arch taratects lost, Mother obviously has to make another move.

Otherwise, at this rate, she's gonna die.

However, Mother hasn't shown any signs of attempting anything else.

This is despite the fact that she still has underlings to control.

Ever since I ate part of Mother's spiritual body, I've been able to see through her eyes.

I'm not sure where in the labyrinth it is, but somewhere there's a huge spider army, including arch taratects.

Mother is at the heart of it all, unmoving.

Looking at this, I can tell that the force she sent after our real body before was only a small portion of her army of followers.

Why doesn't she send the rest of them after our body?

I just don't get it.

I mean, our real body is strong, if I do say so myself.

Sure, we were able to defeat the arch taratects only through the use of underhanded tactics, but we also fought an equally strong opponent—no, even stronger—the earth dragon Araba, and won in a fair fight.

Still, if two or more arch taratects attack the main body at the same time, they certainly have a solid chance of winning.

And yet, Mother isn't doing that.

Even though she has way more than two arch taratects.

She just sits there idly while battling us spirit projections, as if she's waiting for something.

Well, I'm sure if she sent such an impossibly large spider army after our main body, it'd just use Teleport to run away without hesitation.

…Wait a sec.

Could it be that Mother understands that, too?

She knows that I have no problem running away from a fight I know I can't win?

That's very possible.

Mother and I have been connected by her Kin Control skill since the moment I

was born.

I doubt she pays much attention to every one of her countless children, but considering how uniquely I've been doing things, I might've caught her eye(s) somewhere along the line.

If Mother's been using that skill to monitor my actions, I wouldn't be surprised if she's familiar with my behavior patterns by now.

In fact, maybe she used that knowledge to carefully arrange that first army in a way that would make me think that I might have a chance of winning if I fought hard.

Really, if I had fought that army fair and square instead of using dirty tricks, I have the feeling my odds of losing were just a little higher than my odds of winning.

If it was just the arch taratects, I think I would've won.

After factoring in that mob of followers, my chances were pretty slim.

But that slim chance was key.

It would've been tough, but it wasn't so terrible that I definitely couldn't win.

If I think I stand a chance, I can't bring myself to run away, even if my odds of losing are much higher.

In the end, of course, our side won with room to spare.

Still, if Mother actually thought things through that far ahead, then she must be craftier than I gave her credit for.

I'd say that'd make her as smart as a human being, or maybe even smarter.

In which case, her current lack of action is downright suspicious.

If she doesn't do something, we spirit bodies are going to beat her.

Why would she just sit around like that?

Just biding her time, almost like she's waiting for something?

No, not "almost." That's got to be it.

But what's she waiting for, then?

As if to confirm my sneaking suspicions, Mother's hitherto motionless body suddenly shifts into action, as does the enormous spider army around her.

All of them move at once.

The spider army splits up into several squadrons, each spearheaded by arch taratects, before dispersing. At the same time, Mother starts to move at a speed much higher than seems possible for her enormous body.

She got us.

Mother was waiting for this moment.

〖Contact the main body!〗

【I can't! Mother's interfering with the connection somehow!】

Seriously?

That's not good.

I don't know what skill she's using, but she seems to have temporarily cut us spirit projections off from contact with the main body.

Now we can't tell our real body that it's in danger!

It's all too clear now what she was waiting for.

The moment our real body went outside.

Now she's distributing her troops throughout the labyrinth, where our main body will teleport to at the first sign of trouble—cutting off our escape routes in advance.

Then, when our body has nowhere left to go, the queen herself will lead the rest of her army to hunt us down.

From the bottom of a deep, dark pit, Mother begins to race upward at a horrifying speed.

And as soon as she approaches the ceiling, she opens her terrible mouth.

Out comes the attack that destroys everything: Breath.

A pseudo-breath attack using the Dragon Power skill, likely modeled after the kind used by real dragons.

However, just because it’s not the real thing doesn’t mean it’s weak.

In fact, it explodes with more force than a real dragon’s breath, smashing through the thick ceiling of the labyrinth.

The earth shakes as if the world’s been turned upside down.

Huge meteorite-size rocks plummet toward the bottom of the pit like rain.

After the debris stops falling, it gives way to a clear blue sky.

If I could, I would scream, *You’re kidding me, right?!*

Seriously, Mother? You broke through the labyrinth itself to get outside?

My sense of security, the assurance that surely Mother was too large to ever leave the labyrinth, vanishes in an instant.

Mother has escaped the cramped confines of the cage known as the Great Elroe Labyrinth.

And now, of course, she’s heading straight for our real body.

Who has no idea that any of this is happening.



Entering the Great Elroe Labyrinth

“U-um, hey. The thing is, I kinda can’t swim…”

After Basgath agreed to guide us yesterday, we finished our preparations and are now about to enter the Great Elroe Labyrinth.

Instead of the entrance that was guarded by a fortress, we’re currently standing by the ocean.

“Listen up. If you jump off this cliff, there’s an entrance to the Great Elroe Labyrinth on the ocean floor below. We don’t have any idiots who can’t swim here, right?”

That was the question that prompted Fei’s reluctant confession.

When everyone stares at Fei with disbelief, she shrinks in embarrassment.

Even Basgath was probably joking when he said that; I doubt he actually expected that someone in our group couldn’t swim.

Now he scratches his head awkwardly.

By the way, we’re all in swimsuits right now.

Which means that Basgath had already told us that we’d be swimming, and yet Fei held out until the very last minute to admit that she can’t.

“You really can’t swim?”

Hyrince breaks the awkward silence with a somber tone.

“Yeah…”

Fei’s voice nearly fades into the wind.

This is kind of…unexpected.

In both this life and her previous one, Fei has always seemed like someone who can do just about anything.

But now that I think about it, I guess I've never seen her swimming.

Of course, there aren't any safe places for swimming, like pools, in this world, so we've rarely had the chance to do it here anyway.

There was a pool at the high school we went to in our previous lives, but since boys and girls had separate swim classes, I never saw her swim then, either.

In short, I have no way of knowing how bad she actually is.

"Fei, what's the best you can do?"

"Beats me. In our old world, I couldn't even swim eighty feet. And I haven't tried it at all in this body."

That wasn't a very helpful answer.

Does that mean she can swim a little bit, just not eighty feet?

Otherwise, she probably would have just said she can't swim at all.

Plus, with her status, I bet she could manage to swim somehow.

Her stats alone are higher than mine.

She is a dragon, after all.

"What should we do?"

Hyrince furrows his brow.

Fei is the strongest fighter in our group.

Since we're going to battle Hugo, we can't just leave her here.

"If you're having trouble, I'll help you get down there."

Katia shoots me a glare as soon as I say it, but what else are we supposed to do?

Fei's body is heavy.

She may be in human form now, but she still weighs the same as she did as a dragon.

When she’s in this form, she gets around this by using Heavy Magic to manipulate gravity.

But underwater, she might have to cancel the spell, since she won’t be able to control it precisely.

If that happens, I’m the only one who would be able to support her weight, since my stats are the highest.

It doesn’t make sense for anyone but me to take on that job.

Katia must know that, which is probably why she’s merely glaring at me and not saying anything.

I feel like it would be less intimidating if she would just say something, to be honest.

“Fei, you had better swim like your life depends on it.”

Katia directs her wrath toward Fei instead.

It sends a chill down my spine, even though it wasn’t directed at me.

Fei nods silently, but I’m pretty sure I see her face go a little pale.

“Hoo, boy. Are these kids gonna be able to keep it together?”

“I don’t know if I can promise that, but there’s not much we can do.”

Basgath’s raised eyebrows and Hyrince’s sigh are a little painful.

“All right, kiddos. Focus! The ocean is the water dragons’ territory. If you let your guard down, it’ll snap you up just like that!”

At Basgath’s scolding, we drop the light bickering and tense up.

“All right, here we go! Follow me, you lot!”

With that, Basgath jumps off the cliff.

The rest of us follow close on his heels.

Plunging into the water, I quickly look around.

Right nearby, Fei is flailing her limbs in a frantic attempt at swimming.

She doesn’t seem to be drowning, but she’s not really getting anywhere,

either.

Grabbing one of her hands, I pull her along.

I don't know if it's the Heavy Magic or the effect of the water, but she doesn't feel heavy at all.

It shouldn't be too hard to reach the entrance with her.

I start swimming, following Basgath.

We dive deeper and deeper. After maybe thirty feet or so, the entrance to the Great Elroe Labyrinth comes into view.

Basgath swims into the gaping hole in the rock face first.

He's followed in order by Hyrince, Ms. Oka, Anna, and Katia.

Just then, I suddenly feel a presence behind me.

Turning apprehensively, I see a huge creature swimming toward us serenely.

A water dragon.

It looks just like the Loch Ness Monster.

As soon as it sees us, the water dragon charges without hesitation.

"Mmph?!"

Fei struggles to get away, but all she can manage is whipping around in the water, making very little progress.

I try to quickly move us away, too, but of course the water dragon has the edge on underwater maneuvers. At this rate, it'll catch up to us before we get to the entrance.

If it reaches us, it's all over.

Fighting a water dragon while holding my breath underwater would be nothing short of suicide. On top of that, my weapons are currently in Basgath's Spatial Storage bag, so I'm unarmed.

Fei glances at me and sees my panic, then turns around and opens her mouth.

A torrent of brilliant light rushes out from her throat.

It’s a breath attack!

The breath surges through the water toward the water dragon.

Defending itself, the water dragon counters with a breath of its own.

The light dragon’s and the water dragon’s attacks collide, sending shock waves out through the water.

Luckily enough, the waves push Fei and me right into the entrance to the labyrinth.

As we’re sent spinning through the narrow tunnel, our bodies tumble off the walls repeatedly.

Not wanting to get separated, I pull Fei toward me and hang on tight.

It’s almost like we’re hurtling through a waterslide with no safety measures whatsoever.

For a second, it feels like we’re floating.

Finally, we crash to the ground magnificently.

In my attempt to shield Fei from the impact, I end up getting slammed that much harder.

Somehow, we’ve made it to the cave at the end of the tunnel.

Opening my eyes, I see Basgath with a torch in hand.

His body is pretty scratched up.

Everyone else has a considerable amount of scrapes, too.

We were basically flushed at high speed through a fairly long tunnel, so I guess we’re lucky the damage wasn’t worse.

It’s certainly better than it would’ve been if we’d ended up fighting that water dragon.

However, although the wounds are shallow, our bathing suits have all been torn in some places.

Ms. Oka and her childlike body are fine, but Katia and Anna have been left in a pretty suggestive state.

Also, Katia is glowering at me as she covers up her ripped swimsuit with her hands.



“Urk, sorry.”

“I won’t dare to ask what that apology is for, but perhaps you could let go now?”

At Katia’s cold words, I realize I’ve been holding on to Fei this whole time.

Suddenly deeply aware of her soft skin pressed against my body, I hastily pull away.

“S-s-s-sorry!”

“Hmm. Well, you saved me, so I guess we’ll call it even.”

I bow my head in gratitude to Fei’s generous decree.

“Argh! With a start like this, I dread to think how the rest of the journey’s going to go!”

Privately, I couldn’t agree more with Mr. Basgath.

At any rate, since we’re all scratched up, we’d better treat our wounds.

We have to change into our regular clothes, too, but it’d be better to take care of our injuries first, right?

Although the women probably don’t want to remain in this state any longer than they have to.

“Well, at least we managed to enter safely, more or less. Welcome to our hell on earth, the Great Elroe Labyrinth.”

Groaning at Basgath’s dramatic line, I set about preparing some healing magic.



3 Mother Attack

Having decided at random to head toward the mountains, I enjoy my first stroll since being reincarnated.

In my previous life, I was an honorary shut-in who left the house only to go to school (I don't really remember going anywhere else, anyway). But this time around, I'm a healthy young spider who enjoys the outdoors!

Since I never left the Great Elroe Labyrinth until now, I guess technically I've been a shut-in this whole time, but that's ancient history now!

Walking is super-fun!

I guess humans really do need sunlight to live.

Can't produce vitamin D without soaking up some sun!

Not that it matters to me, since I'm a spider now!

Still, just enjoying a little sunshine is raising my energy levels waaay up.

Really makes you realize how great the sun is.

Although I guess I don't actually know if this planet calls its star the sun or what have you.

As a side note, there's only one sun here, too.

I don't know if there's a moon yet.

I'll probably find out when night falls, but I can't help but wonder if there'll be two moons, like an honest-to-goodness sci-fi/fantasy world.

Now, *that* I'd like to see.

The stars are probably different from Earth's, so I'm a little curious about that,

too.

Man, I'm looking forward to nighttime.

In my old life, when all I did was play games, I could never have imagined being this interested in nature.

Speaking of nature, Appraisal works really well on the flowers around here.

I was kind of surprised that it showed the names of every single plant.

If my Appraisal level was still low, it'd probably just label the whole mess "grass."

Anyway, since I spent a long time curiously Appraising everything, I haven't gotten as far as I expected.

But I guess it's not like I'm in any rush.

Enjoying my leisurely walk, I eventually pass through the plains and reach the forest.

The second I get close, I notice that all of the living creatures in the forest start fleeing immediately.

Yeah, yeah.

Almost forgot—I'm a dangerous monster who crawled out of the labyrinth and all that.

I guess it makes sense that normal animals would want to run away from me.

Kinda feels like I've been brought back down to earth for a second.

Okay, that takes the wind out of my sails a little.

Oh well. I shake it off and start exploring the forest.

The animals may have run away, but the plants are obviously still here.

Discovering some kind of fruit growing in the forest, I Appraise it, then try a bite.

Mm!

So sweet! So tasty!

Thanks, Mother Nature!

Oh man, I'm sooo happy.

Maybe I can just live in the forest, eating fruit, until I evolve into an arachne.

Hmm?

Did the ground shake a little just now?

Like a magnitude-3-ish earthquake?

Seems like there are earthquakes in this world, too.

I never felt any shaking while I was in the Great Elroe Labyrinth, so I had no idea.

Maybe it doesn't happen as often here as it does in Japan?

I guess Japan probably has shakes a little too often.

My thoughts are interrupted by Danger Perception going off alarmingly.

My whole body stiffens, warning me that I'm in danger.

I haven't felt fear like this in a long while.

This particular sensation seems familiar.

It's the same fear I felt when I was first born.

Huh? You're kidding me, right?

I mean, that thing could never come out of the labyrinth.

But the alarm bells in my head are growing louder by the second.

My senses are screaming that I can't stay here.

Dash!

I run away at full speed, trying to put as much distance between the source of danger and myself as I can.

Immediately, I sense a huge amount of power converging on me from far behind.

This doesn't look good.

I change my course, veering to the side.

Using my Skanda skill, which I've had since birth, I continue gaining speed, running away with all my might.

Seconds later, the forest I was just standing in…is gone.

At the edge of my vision, I see a torrent of black energy.

It resembles Araba's breath attack but with a different attribute and far more powerful.

I'm guessing that was the Dark attribute.

And it was even stronger than Araba's full-powered breath attack.

Not to mention, this was launched from miles away. Yet it managed to destroy a section of a forest, then still had energy to spare to shave off a fragment of the distant mountain I was heading toward.

Araba's breath was powerful enough to destroy my home, sure.

But this isn't even on the same level.

I've seen this insane amount of power only once before.

In the Middle Stratum, when I saw a swarm of wyrms led by the fire dragon Rend all but wiped out by a single attack.

I look back to see what created this attack.

It's the same giant beast I expected to see.

This is my third time seeing it with my own eyes.

The first time was when I was born.

The second time was when I saw that fire dragon get beaten down.

And the third time is now. My mother, the queen taratect, is aiming her fearsome power right at me.

Run!

Run!

Run awaaay!

I don’t know how she got out of the labyrinth or how she knew where I was, but there’s no time to worry about that right now! Just gotta escape!

The instant I saw Mother in the flesh, I became acutely aware that I didn’t stand a chance.

I didn’t think it would be possible at this distance, but I manage to Appraise her somehow. Maybe it’s because my Parallel Minds are still connected to her.

<Queen taratect (Weakened) LV 89

Status:

HP: 20,557/20,557 (MAX 24,557) (green) +0 (details)

SP: 19,097/19,097 (MAX 23,097) (yellow) (details)

Average Offensive Ability: 20,439 (MAX 24,439) (details) Average Magical Ability: 17,977 (MAX 21,977) (details) Average Speed Ability: 20,400 (MAX 24,400) (details)

MP: 18,301/18,301 (MAX 22,301) (blue) +0 (details)

: 19,991/19,991 (MAX 23,991)

(red) +0 (details)

Average Defensive Ability: 20,286 (MAX 24,286) (details) Average Resistance Ability: 17,946 (MAX 21,946) (details)

Skills:

[HP Ultra-Fast Recovery LV 4]

[MP Rapid Recovery LV 10]

[MP Lessened Consumption LV 10]

[Magic Divinity LV 3]

[Magic Power Conferment LV 5]

[Magic Power Super-Attack LV 1]

[SP Rapid Recovery LV 10]

[SP Minimized Consumption LV 10]

[Destruction Super-Enhancement LV 5]

[Impact Super-Enhancement LV 6]

[Cutting Super-Enhancement LV 3]

[Piercing Super-Enhancement LV 5]

[Shock Super-Enhancement LV 5]	[Status Condition Super-Enhancement LV 10]	[Battle Divinity LV 9]	[Energy Conferment LV 10]
[Ability Conferment LV 6]	[Energy Super-Attack LV 3]	[Divine Dragon Power LV 6]	[Dragon Barrier LV 2]
[Deadly Poison Attack LV 10]	[Enhanced Paralysis Attack LV 10]	[Heretic Attack LV 7]	[Poison Synthesis LV 10]
[Medicine Synthesis LV 10]	[Thread Genius LV 10]	[Divine Thread Weaving]	[Thread Control LV 10]
[Psychokinesis LV 3]	[Throw LV 10]	[Expel LV 10]	[Dimensional Maneuvering LV 10]
[Kin Control LV 10]	[Egg-Laying LV 10]	[Concentration LV 10]	[Thought Acceleration LV 9]
[Future Sight LV 3]	[Parallel Minds LV 9]	[High-Speed Processing LV 10]	[Hit LV 10]
[Evasion LV 10]	[Probability Super-Correction LV 10]	[Stealth LV 10]	[Concealment LV 2]
[Silence LV 10]	[Odorless LV 1]	[Emperor]	[Heretic Magic LV 10]
[Shadow Magic LV 10]	[Dark Magic LV 10]	[Black Magic LV 4]	[Poison Magic LV 10]
[Healing Magic LV 10]	[Demon Lord LV 5]	[Satiation LV 10]	[Destruction Super-Resistance LV 4]
[Impact Nullification]	[Cutting Super-Resistance LV 4]	[Piercing Super-Resistance LV 4]	[Shock Super-Resistance LV 4]
[Flame Resistance LV 2]	[Flood Resistance LV 1]	[Gale Resistance LV 1]	[Terrain Resistance LV 2]
[Bolt Resistance LV 1]	[Holy Light Resistance LV 9]	[Earth Resistance LV 8]	[Heavy Super-Resistance LV 1]
[Status Condition	[Acid Super-Resistance	[Rot Resistance LV 8]	[Faint Resistance

Resistance]	LV 3]		LV 5]
[Fear Resistance LV 8]	[Heresy Resistance LV 9]	[Pain Nullification]	[Suffering Nullification]
[Night Vision LV 10]	[Long-Distance Vision LV 1]	[Five Senses Super-Enhancement LV 10]	[Perception Expansion LV 8]
[Divinity Expansion LV 2]	[Ultimate Life LV 10]	[Ultimate Magic LV 10]	[Ultimate Movement LV 10]
[Fortune LV 10]	[Fortitude LV 10]	[Stronghold LV 10]	[Deva LV 10]
[Sanctum LV 10]	[Skanda LV 10]	[Taboo LV 10]	

Skill Points: 164,500

Titles:

[Kin Eater]	[Foul Feeder]	[Poison Technique User]	[Monster Slayer]
[Thread User]	[Assassin]	[Human Slayer]	[Fearbringer]
[Merciless]	[Monster Slaughterer]	[Wyrm Slayer]	[Dragon Slayer]
[Champion]	[Monster Calamity]	[Lord]	[Human Slaughterer]
[Wyrm Slaughterer]	[Human Calamity]		

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What kind of beast is this?

Her stats are all higher than 20,000!

Mathematically, that means she’s around five times stronger than Araba.

How am I supposed to win?

Seriously, those stats are even worse than I imagined.

I was prepared for them to be more than 10,000, sure, but double that?

I guess the one silver lining is that her stats have been reduced for some reason.

They've all lost about 4,000 points each.

Maybe that's thanks to the hard work of my Parallel Minds?

That would mean that I'm the one who reduced her stats this much.

Man, am I amazing or what?

Unfortunately, that still doesn't mean I stand a chance of winning.

Even when she's weakened, her lowest stat still far exceeds my highest.

I have to run away.

Jumping into a fight I can't win is tantamount to suicide.

And I definitely don't want to die like that.

If I'm completely backed into a corner, then sure, I'll go down fighting my hardest, but right now I still have a chance of surviving if I run away.

There's still a lot of distance between Mother and me.

Because her speed is higher than mine, she would catch me eventually in a chase, but it'd still take her a while to close the gap.

Also, that powerful breath did manage to reach my position in spite of the huge distance between us, but I'm sure I'll be able to tell when she's preparing a huge attack like that.

It shouldn't be impossible for me to escape the blast radius in time, either, I think.

Anyway, while I'm running away from Mother, I'd better start putting together a Long-Distance Teleport spell in a hurry.

Unlike Short-Range Teleport, Long-Distance takes time to prepare.

Even with my Height of Occultism skill, I still need a few minutes.

And since I have to concentrate on constructing such a complicated rune for it, I can't use any other magic at the same time.

Generally speaking, it isn't something I can use during battle.

But it’s the perfect spell for escaping.

I can teleport to anywhere that I’ve been before, no matter how far away.

As long as I can complete the spell, my retreat back into the Great Elroe Labyrinth won’t take even a second.

Right now, the pleasant scenery of the outdoors seems far more dangerous.

Better to hide in the complicated labyrinth, safe in a narrow passage that Mother can’t easily enter.

I just have to last a few minutes until the Teleport spell is ready.

But now I sense Mother chasing behind me at a frightening speed.

So damn fast!

How can such an enormous body be this speedy?!

I glance backward for a moment.

Wow. She’s basically causing natural disasters just by moving.

Wherever her feet land, huge chunks of earth go flying. The areas she’s passed through are completely wrecked, like a huge tornado just hit.

The wind generated by her speed alone is enough to mow down everything in her path.

You know those monster movies where the monster stomps around, destroying streets and buildings? Yeah, this is worse.

Mother is basically the incarnation of destruction right now.

Just running by is enough to wreak havoc on the world around her?

This is no joke!

If she so much as steps on me, my little body is gonna get decimated!

But now is no time to be frozen in fear.

That’s ’cause, like, judging by Mother’s mouth, it kinda seems like she’s charging up another breath attack.

While moving toward me at full speed.

Um, wait a second.

Can you really shoot that breath while moving?

Don’t you normally have to stop to charge a big attack like that, never mind fire it?

This doesn’t seem fair!

Panicking, I change direction.

I’m trying to get out of the straight line where I assume the breath is going to hit.

But Future Sight kicks in, showing me a horrifying scene.

Oh crap!

I switch gears again, abandoning my sideways movement to take to the sky with Dimensional Maneuvering.

Immediately, Mother jumps up high.

She fires her breath through the air I just leaped from.

Then sweeps horizontally.

The breath attack devastates a wide swath of land in seconds.

Even in the air, I still get slammed by the shock waves, sending me into a tailspin.

Still, at least the damage is minor.

If I’d stayed on the ground, I would’ve taken a direct hit from that breath.

Compared to that, I prefer losing about 30 percent of my HP any day!

If the shock waves alone cause that much damage, a direct hit would’ve freaking vaporized me!

I manage to gain control in the air and keep fleeing.

I don’t want to waste precious seconds getting back down to the ground.

In fact, the ground’s been blown to bits anyway, meaning I couldn’t even if I wanted to.

If this is what it's like when she's weakened, I would hate to see Mother's full-power breath when she's in her normal state.

I glance back at Mother.

She lands on the ruined ground like it's no big deal, raising an enormous cloud of dust.

I'm pretty sure I saw the earth literally shake when she hit.

Then, ignoring the impact of the landing, she goes right back to running toward me.

A part of me can't help thinking that she looks pretty badass, charging toward me with a cloud of dust rising in her wake.

It really is like a scene out of a movie.

Just much, much scarier.

Jumping with that giant body, landing, and breaking into a run again without a second thought? How aggressive can you be?

This ain't some CG animation. It's reality, and it's coming for me.

Why do I have to deal with a situation that would make a Hollywood director wet themselves?!

The distance between us is already around half of where it started a minute ago.

In other words, she'll catch up to me in another half a minute.

The Teleport should be ready just seconds before that.

As long as I don't screw this up, I'm gonna make it!

But seriously, I better not screw this up.

Mother starts activating magic spells as she runs.

I'm working on a spell while I run, too, so I guess I can't complain this time.

I can't, but I want to!

Judging by the looks of it, Mother is using the Dark Magic spell Dark Bullet.

It’s a very simple spell, the weakest level of Dark Magic.

That’s all well and good, but the amount of shots and their range are definitely not normal.

The greater the range of the magic, the weaker it becomes.

If Mother wants to damage me from several miles away, she’d have to use a huge amount of MP.

And have the magical prowess to perform it, too.

It’s no surprise that Mother can do something like that, of course.

But I still think it’s unfair that she can fire so many that it’s like a rain of bullets!

I dodge and weave around the fusillade as I push forward.

As a result, my speed slows down, and Mother is catching up to me that much faster.

I did consider simply tanking the hits as I run.

My magic defense is pretty high, and I’ve got Dragon Power to dispel magic, too.

I might not even take damage at all if I get hit.

However, the problem isn’t the damage itself but the time I’d lose.

When an attack hits you, besides the damage, it has a certain impact.

What if that slowed me down?

Or worse yet, if it caused me to lose my balance and fall, it’d all be over in an instant.

Dodging is the best option to keep unknown variables out of the equation.

I thought that was the right decision.

However, it was based on incorrect assumptions.

See, I thought this magic barrage was meant to slow me down.

But I was wrong.

It was meant as a distraction.

By the time I notice, it’s too late.

A third breath attack has been charging up in Mother’s mouth.

I have no time to take evasive action before the breath shoots forth.

My body is about to be swallowed up by an oncoming wave of destruction.

Just before it hits, my teleport magic is complete.

I activate it immediately and escape into the Great Elroe Labyrinth by a hairbreadth.

I made it.

If the teleportation had been even one second later, I would’ve died.

As it is, about a quarter of my body was annihilated.

Two of my hind legs are gone, and even a piece of my abdomen.

The fact that I’m still alive must be thanks to either my nature as a spider or the grace of my skills and stats.

At any rate, I can’t just leave things like this.

I have to use Healing Magic to fix myself up right away.

As soon as that thought flashes through my mind, I check my surroundings again.

This area is a sort of midpoint between the Middle and Upper Stratums.

I teleported here, since I’d built a home here once.

Now, it’s where a massive army of spiders has been lying in wait for me.



Navigating the Great Elroe Labyrinth

I don’t know where I am.

A vast, empty space.

And a lone woman is there with me.

Her body is disappearing, like it’s melting into the space, leaving only part of her upper body behind.

It’s heartrending to witness.

Then, mechanical words spill from her mouth.

“Proficiency has reached the required level.”

“Experience has reached the required level.”

“Proficiency has reached the required level.”

……

“It hurts.”

My eyes flash open, and I jerk upright.

Quickly, I check my surroundings.

A lamp emits a faint light.

The walls it illuminates are natural rock, and the ground, too, is hard enough that I can feel it through my sleeping bag.

The Great Elroe Labyrinth, Upper Stratum.

Now I remember where I am and why.

That’s right. We came to this labyrinth to cross between the continents.

We've been in here for two days now.

It's currently night. We're sleeping while keeping watch in shifts.

Aside from the water dragon attack right at the start, our trip through the labyrinth has been going fairly well with Basgath as our guide.

The monsters we've encountered thus far haven't been a problem.

Many of the monsters that live in the Upper Stratum of the Great Elroe Labyrinth are poisonous, which would normally make things harder, but most of the party can cure poison with Healing Magic.

On top of that, since our stats are so high, the monsters rarely even get in a hit on us before we crush them.

Hyrince, our tank, has been protecting us by manipulating the monsters into focusing their attacks on him.

Thanks in large part to him, we've been able to push forward without any difficult battles.

We were worried about labyrinth sickness, too, but so far no one seems to be afflicted by it.

In the labyrinth, there's no sunlight, no sense of the passage of time, and you never know when a monster will attack you.

Dealing with this for days on end causes many people's health to falter due to the physical and mental distress.

This is collectively referred to as labyrinth sickness.

To be honest, I was pretty frazzled myself during my first day in the labyrinth.

It's not particularly hot or cold, but it's cramped, and the air feels heavy.

The darkness is so absolute that without the light of Basgath's torch, we wouldn't even be able to see directly in front of us.

Monsters can suddenly attack from the shadows.

In such a constantly tense environment, fatigue builds a lot faster than it would on a normal day's worth of travel.

You can’t blame me for getting a little glum knowing that we’ll have to keep this up for days.

We have to reach the elf village before Hugo does.

That makes me want to get out of the labyrinth as quickly as possible, but rushing like that can be fatal in here.

People who can’t remain calm and proceed at a reasonable pace inevitably fall victim to labyrinth sickness in no time flat.

Basgath explained all this to us during our first day.

Fortunately, if we can make it through the labyrinth within our estimated time, we should have no trouble beating Hugo to the elf village.

We can’t get impatient.

I wipe the dried sweat from my brow.

What was up with that dream I just had?

“Are you all right?”

Ms. Oka peers over at me.

Our night watch shifts are in groups of two.

The current guards are Ms. Oka and Basgath.

Apparently, she called out to me because I was groaning as I woke up.

“I’m fine. I just had a bit of a bad dream.”

I hide my worries with a smile.

In the end, it was only a dream, after all.

“That there is an ill omen.”

My words were intended to dodge the subject, but Basgath latches onto them.

“An omen?”

“Yeh got that right. Have yeh heard of the Nightmare of the Labyrinth?”

“No, I don’t think so.”

Basgath usually shouts, but since the rest of our group is sleeping, he's speaking in a hushed tone.

Naturally, his tone lends itself to creating an ominous atmosphere, as if he's telling a ghost story.

"I have," Ms. Oka offers. "It refers to a legendary-class monster that suddenly appeared in the labyrinth some ten years ago, correct?"

"I'm surprised yeh know that. I figured a little girl yer age wouldn't be familiar with such an old story."

"Yes, I just happened to hear about it some time ago."

A legendary-class monster.

That refers to a monster deemed higher than danger level S, said to be impossible for any human to defeat.

"The Nightmare is a living calamity of the Great Elroe Labyrinth, on par with the queen herself. If yeh had a bad dream, that might mean that the Nightmare is going to show up…"

"But isn't it already dead?" Ms. Oka asked.

"That's what they say."

"You don't believe it?"

"Aye. They say it was killed like any ordinary monster, but I don't buy it. A beast like that wouldn't go down easily. If yeh ask me, it's still alive somewhere, watching and waiting for its next prey."

"That almost makes it sound as if you've seen it for yourself."

"Yeah, that's right. Truth be told, I was the one who first discovered the Nightmare."

For some reason, Basgath puffs up his chest.

I guess that is impressive, probably?

"See, back then there was a monster outbreak incident, so a group of knights was sent in to investigate the cause and thin out the monsters. I was their guide. Turns out, the reason for the outbreak was that the Nightmare had

driven all the monsters in its vicinity out of their homes. But we didn't know that, which explains why we walked right into the Nightmare's lair. I'll never forget that moment. The second our eyes met, I thought I was a goner."

Basgath shudders at the memory.

"Sounds like you're lucky that you made it out alive."

"Yeah, about that. The Nightmare has some unusual habits, see. If yeh don't attack it, it'll let yeh go. In fact, it might even heal yer wounds."

"What?"

"Unbelievable, right? I hear the party that was sent in after us to kill it got wiped out in a flash. Maybe they pissed it off or something. And yet, other times it's been known to help people, as if on a whim. It's a mysterious, unpredictable monster, that."

What kind of inconsistent monster is that?

Is it even a monster at all?

"But one thing's for sure: The Nightmare is outrageously strong. Yeh seem pretty strong from what I've seen, boy, but there'll always be someone stronger than you. In this world, there are some fights you just can't win. Remember that."

Those words bring Sophia and Ronandt to mind.

I couldn't so much as lay a finger on either of them.

"Yes, I know. There's always someone stronger."

I clench my fists tight.

If we keep facing off with Hugo, I might have to fight those two again.

If I do, will I be able to win?

No, I can't think like that. I have to win.

To protect all of humanity and to keep the world from falling into chaos.

I have to stop Hugo, which means I have to beat those two.

"Sounds like yeh got some foes of yer own. But don't get too fired up about it,

hear? Everyone has things they can do and things they can't. Trying to do the impossible anyway won't change a thing. Just stick to what yeh can do."

Basgath tries to reassure me, though I can't say I agree.

"But there are some things I have to do."

If you run away from things you can't do, you'll never be able to do them.

Sure, I'll acknowledge it.

As I am right now, I probably can't beat Sophia or Ronandt.

But I'm going to beat them.

I'll find a way to win.

Besides, it's not like I have to do it all on my own.

I have friends I can depend on.

"That so? Well, do yer best, as long as it don't kill you."

"I will."

"All right, then. Lots of people die because they tried to do something they couldn't. It don't take much to kill a person, y'know. If yeh die because yeh bit off more than yeh could chew, don't that mean yeh should've sized things up better beforehand?"

Basgath's unexpectedly serious advice surprises me. Then I realize something.

He's probably seen this happen to people many times before.

"Fighting to protect something is a fine thing to do, boy. But it ain't shameful to run away from an enemy yeh know yeh can't beat. If yeh die there, yeh can never fight again, right? If yeh can't win this time, just run away, get stronger, then try again. Although there are some beasts in this world yeh'll never reach no matter how hard yeh try."

A guide spends all his time in the harsh environment of the labyrinth.

And this man has continued carrying out his duties well into old age.

He must have had experiences that I can't even begin to imagine.

"But what if you're not allowed to run away?"

I asked cautiously.

The fight we're heading for is one we can't shirk.

The fate of humanity may even hang in the balance.

If we lose, Hugo will likely plunge the world even further into chaos.

So I can't afford to lose or run away.

"Huh? Just ignore that and run anyway. What's wrong with trying to survive? If anyone has a problem with it, just tell 'em to take care of it themselves."

Basgath's answer wasn't especially helpful.

"I told yeh, didn't I? There are some things yeh just can't do. Every person alive has their limits, eh? Thinking yeh can do anything is nothing but arrogance. Or pride, at best."

Both Ms. Oka and I widen our eyes at Basgath's bitter words.

"I'm not saying it's good to duck yer responsibilities, o'course. As a labyrinth guide, I'll protect my clients even if it costs me own life. But everyone has a certain amount they can handle. If the responsibilities forced on yeh are more than yeh can handle, yeh ought to at least consider running. Sure yer not taking on more responsibilities than yeh should, boy?"

I can't seem to answer right away.

Responsibilities.

Because I'm the hero.

Because I'm a reincarnation like Hugo.

If I put it that way, it's easy to convince myself.

But if I ask myself if all that responsibility should fall to me, I don't know how to answer.

"'Course, if it's more than yeh can handle but yeh still wanna give it a shot, far be it from me to try to talk yeh out of it. I'm just telling yeh what I believe. In the end, what's most important is what you yerself want to do."

What do I want to do?

The answer is obvious.

I decided to follow in my brother Julius's footsteps.

And Julius would never run away.

He was a hero among heroes, who truly desired world peace above all else.

"Thank you for your advice. But I still don't think I can run away. I'm the hero, after all."

My voice is steady.

Sophia and Ronandt are powerful, but I can't afford to hesitate now.

After we defeat Hugo, there's still the battle with the demons to contend with.

And with them, that "white" little girl who killed Julius.

A monster in the truest sense of the word, who was able to defeat my powerful older brother with ease.

I'm going to have to fight her someday.

So I can't stop until I'm strong enough to win that fight.

If anything, the idea of running is ridiculous.

"I truly appreciate your concern. But this really is what I want to do."

"Is that right? Then I won't say anything else. Do yer best, boy."

I bow my head, and Basgath smacks my shoulder encouragingly.

Ouch.

"What I really want to do… Right. Of course. I mustn't regret it."

Distracted by Basgath's merciless shoulder pounding, I didn't quite hear Ms. Oka murmuring to herself quietly.

It's been five days since we entered the labyrinth.

We're about halfway through.

Since we're a small group and all of us have high stats, we've been able to push forward along the shortest route at a fast pace.

There’s still the slight possibility of labyrinth sickness, but since Basgath is a veteran guide, he’s been moderating our pace so that we can make progress without pushing ourselves too hard.

I was worried that empire soldiers might ambush us along the way, but according to Basgath, that would be impossible.

The empire tends to avoid the labyrinth in the first place, and attempting such a thing would be much more dangerous than it would be effective.

With the many mazelike passages, anyone planning on laying a trap would have no way of knowing which path we would take, meaning they wouldn’t know where to wait.

Thus, our only enemies in the labyrinth are monsters.

And so far, they haven’t been much of a threat.

We have Hyrince as our tank, Ms. Oka bringing up the rear, and Katia, Fei, and I serving as either vanguard or rear guard.

Since Mr. Basgath is our guide, he doesn’t generally participate in battle. On the occasion that he does, though, he shows enough strength to hold his own with our other members.

We might be a ragtag team, but I’d say we’ve come together pretty well.

Aside from one person.

“All right, stop. Time for a little break.”

Everyone halts at Basgath’s call.

He quickly confirms that the area is safe, then spreads out our baggage so that we can rest.

As everyone else settles down to relax unconcernedly, one person alone all but collapses, breathing heavily.

“I’m so terribly sorry,” she whispers to me.

I shake my head, patting Anna gently on the shoulder.

Anna is an excellent mage.

But among all the high-class warriors here, she can't help but fall behind.

And since her stats are geared toward magic, her physical strength is low.

If we don't take short breaks along the way, Anna won't be able to keep up with our movement speed.

Since Ms. Oka is a still-growing elf, her physical stats are low as well, but she can use her excess of magical powers to enhance that.

Though she looks like a small child, she's skilled in close combat, too.

Is this the difference between pure elves and half elves, or is Ms. Oka just special?

It's probably the latter, but the obvious gap is taking a physical and mental toll on Anna.

Her mental state was already strained, but the pressure of not holding us back on our quest is only making her burden heavier.

She's beginning to show signs of labyrinth sickness.

At this rate, she might be in danger.

Basgath has noticed her condition and attempts to manage our pace accordingly, but Anna is pushing herself to try to keep up with us.

Maybe it was a mistake to bring her along.

But if we had left her behind, I would've been worried about her, too.

I don't think there was any right answer in this situation.

I agreed to let Anna come along, so I have to take responsibility by watching over her.

It seems like everyone else understands that, too, since no one has said anything.

Basgath might not know the details of the situation, but he's a pro. He'll guide us no matter what.

He won't complain about one of his clients being slow.

The only person who seems a little disgruntled is Katia.

Maybe I should try to talk to her about it in a more indirect way later.

“Now, we’ve made it about halfway through the labyrinth, so we need to decide which route to take from here.”

Basgath is addressing me.

I’ll have to worry about Anna later.

“There are several routes ahead of us. There’s the shortest but most dangerous route, the relatively safe roundabout route, and the sketchier route that may or may not be dangerous. Which would yeh prefer?”

“Hmm. How dangerous is the shortest route?”

“Well, there are two kinds of passages in the Upper Stratum. There are the normal passages, the narrow kind like the one we’re in now. Then there’s the large passage.”

Pausing for a moment, he hands me a drink.

I accept it gratefully.

“The large passage, as the name implies, is much taller and wider than this one. Think of it like a big hall that goes on for ages and ages. It also happens to be the shortest route, but there are dangerous monsters there far beyond the kind that lurk in the normal passages. C-class monsters aplenty. Occasionally even A-class monsters, too. It’s a danger zone.”

A-class.

Monsters so strong it could take an army to deal with them.

It’s generally said that B-class monsters are the strongest that a small party can handle on their own.

Monsters have better stats than humans.

In order to make up for it, we polish our skills, gather companions, and use all of our combined wits to cooperate.

That’s how you win against an opponent with higher stats.

But that approach is only viable against monsters that are B-class and below.

A-class monsters are a different story entirely.

Aside from their naturally high stats, they have a superior range of skills.

Skills are human beings' biggest advantage, and these monsters can use them just as proficiently.

Some individuals even have skills specific to monsters, making them especially troublesome to deal with.

A good example of an A-class monster? A high-level wyrm.

Like the one that was likely Fei's parent, which attacked the academy.

Fei is technically classified as a high-level wyrm, too, but since being a reincarnation seems to have given her an extra edge, she's probably closer in power to a dragon.

If we'd been on land, Fei might have even been able to beat the water dragon that attacked us before.

"What's the difference in time between the shortest route and the safer, longer one?"

"Let's see… At our current pace, I'd say about four days."

That's more than I expected.

It must be a pretty big detour.

"And what's the last route you mentioned?"

"Right. About that…"

For some reason, Basgath hesitates.

As I wait expectantly, he scratches his head and looks uncomfortable.

"To be honest, I'd rather not go that way."

"That's certainly very honest. Is there a reason?"

"The Nightmare."

"I beg your pardon?"

"That area used to be the Nightmare's territory. Most guides don't like to go

near the place. It's bad luck. Especially since I've seen the thing with me own eyes… I don't like to be near there if I can help it."

The Nightmare.

That's the legendary-class monster he mentioned before, right?

But isn't that thing supposed to be dead already?

"Incidentally, is that route fast, or…?"

"It's only a little longer than the shortest route. Least, I think the shortest one should be faster. Prolly only a difference of a day or so, if that."

There's the dangerous short route, the safe but lengthy roundabout route, and the somewhat ambiguous route.

"But the Nightmare is gone already, isn't it?"

"Yeah, the Nightmare itself is."

"What do you mean?"

I tilt my head.

That makes it sound like there's something else there.

"We call it a Nightmare's Vestige."

"A Nightmare's Vestige?"

"Yeah. A monster that looks a lot like the Nightmare. It's been seen all over the Upper Stratum but most often in the route I mentioned before."

"Is it a particularly strong monster?"

"Oh, it's strong. And troublesome, too."

If Basgath says so, it must be pretty serious.

I'd definitely prefer not to run into anything like that.

"However, it has the same strange quirks as the Nightmare. If yeh don't attack it, it won't do yeh any harm. If yeh do encounter a Nightmare's Vestige, it's best to do nothing and just wait for it to pass."

"What in the world…?"

I can’t hide my amazement.

Can you really call it a monster if it has such unusual habits?

If you ask me, a monster is supposed to be something that blindly attacks whatever it sees.

“There’s one more thing. It strings up invisible thread all over the place. If yeh cut it or whatnot, it’ll attack yeh.”

“Thread?”

“Yup. I guess I didn’t mention that, huh? The Nightmare is a spider monster. Same for the Nightmare’s Vestiges.”

Spiders, huh…?

“The thread is almost impossible to see, not to mention sticky and tough, which makes it hard to get free if yer caught in it. On top of that, the monster itself is too strong by half. In the old days, when yeh saw a spiderweb, yeh just burned it. But since this Nightmare’s Vestige appeared, if yeh see a spiderweb, yeh just run away. It’s the worst monster in the whole Upper Stratum.”

What a dangerous monster.

It’s that strong and uses such nasty thread, too?

It almost sounds like a monster with the cleverness of a human.

“We’d better not go that route, I’d say.”

Hyrince, who’d been listening to our exchange in silence, speaks up now.

“I went with Julius and the rest of the party to take down a Nightmare’s Vestige once. We managed to scrape out a victory somehow, but it was pretty damn close. Better to avoid it if we can.”

Even Julius and his party had a hard time with this thing?

Yeah, I guess I’d rather not encounter that.

That eliminates that route, then.

Now it’s down to the shortest route and the roundabout route.

“All right, everyone. We have to choose between a fast but dangerous route

or a safe but lengthy route. Can I get your opinions?”

I address the other members of the party as they rest up.

My heart wants to choose the shortest route.

Even if we do have a little time to spare, the sooner we get to the elf village, the better.

But it would be even tougher on Anna, who’s already having a hard time, making it difficult for me to decide.

“I think we should pick the shortest route.”

Ms. Oka speaks first.

I’ve already seen how powerful our teacher is.

To be honest, I never expected her to be able to knock Hugo out completely like that.

In terms of magic ability alone, she’s probably even stronger than I am.

Katia seems like she wants to agree.

“Won’t it be dangerous, though? If more than one A-class monster shows up at once, even we might have trouble dealing with them.”

“Ah, I wouldn’t worry about that,” Basgath informs her. “A-class monsters almost never run with others. If we do happen to encounter one, it’ll be alone.”

“Well then, I’m sure we can handle it.”

Katia nods confidently.

Since we grew up together, I understand Katia very well.

I know she has the ability to back up those words.

“Hmm. I guess I vote for the shortest route, too. Monsters are no big deal for us.”

Fei votes for the shortest route, too.

She seems almost too optimistic, but I guess she can get away with it, given how powerful she is.

Fei is the strongest of our group, after all.

“I don’t know. I don’t think it’s wise to take unnecessary risks.”

Hyrince votes for the safer route.

He probably values our safety even more than the continued existence of the elf village.

Now it’s three to one.

Since Basgath is remaining neutral, that leaves Anna and me.

Half the group is already pushing for the shortest route, but I want to hear Anna’s opinion, too.

“What do you think we should do, Anna?”

“Please, there’s no need to concern yourself with my opinion.”

“No, I want to. You’re a member of the group, too. Go on—tell us what you think.”

I press her a little insistently.

Anna hesitates at first, thinks for a moment, then appears to reach some kind of conclusion.

“Let us take the shortest route, then.”

“Are you sure?”

What I actually mean is *Will you be all right? Will you be able to keep up?*

“Absolutely.”

Her response is firm.

Then there’s nothing else I need to say.

“The short route it is, then.”

Knowing the danger, we’ve decided to push forward nonetheless.



A Brush with Death

I thought I'd teleported to safety, only to find an ambush waiting for me.

This must be Mother's work.

An army of spiders just coincidentally hanging around in the exact place where my home used to be is about as likely as a meteor hitting me square in the face.

It can't be a chance happening, right?

What's really scary is that considering how bad my luck has been so far, it wouldn't surprise me that much if it were.

Still, I think it's much more likely that Mother predicted I would teleport here and sent her forces to wait for me in advance.

I guess I might've underestimated her a little.

In terms of brains, not brawn.

With Mother's huge body, there's no way she could have chased me down while I was running around in the narrow passages of the Great Elroe Labyrinth.

All she had to do was wait for me to come out.

She must have predicted everything I was going to do.

Otherwise, she could never have arranged things to such perfection.

When I left the labyrinth, she came out to chase me down personally.

If she'd finished me off there, that would have been that.

Her sheer speed is higher than mine, meaning the only way I can outrun her is with Long-Distance Teleport.

And where else would I go but back to the Great Elroe Labyrinth?

Specifically, the most likely place I'd flee to first is the spot where my home used to be.

Sending an army there would be an easy way to catch me defenseless as soon as I arrived.

In short, that's the current situation.

I went from using Teleport to kill those arch taratects to having it used against me.

I'm screwed.

I can't even react in time to dodge the arch taratect fangs flying at my face.

Here are the facts: I let my guard down as soon as Teleport activated, then I totally froze up for a second the instant I realized that I was surrounded by a spider army, and the wounds Mother inflicted on me delayed my reaction speed.

All those factors combined prevent me from dodging.

The arch's huge fangs bite into my tiny body.

They don't break through.

I might not look it, but my defense stat is over 2,000.

I haven't Appraised the arch taratect that's chomping on me, which means I don't know for sure, but if it's similar to the ones I fought before, its attack is probably over 4,000.

It's probably using Mental Warfare and Magic Warfare to buff that, too, but its skill levels probably aren't as high as mine.

Even if it does break through my body and bite off a chunk, it won't be the end of the world.

Still, the damage would be huge.

And that's in addition to the severe damage Mother's already inflicted on me.

My injuries are so bad that without Pain Super-Mitigation, I probably

would've passed out by now.

On top of all that, I can feel something seeping into my body from those fangs.

I know exactly what it is, since I have the same move.

Poison Attack. Deadly Poison, to be precise.

Even with my high resistance, I can't nullify it completely.

I have to get away from these fangs soon, or I'll succumb to the poison seeping into my body and die.

That is, if the raw damage doesn't kill me first.

In the midst of the biggest pinch of my life, I become strangely calm and quickly start activating some magic.

Specifically, Earth Magic.

An earthen spear bursts out of the ground and smashes into the arch's head.

I'm not expecting it to do much damage.

All I want is for the impact to loosen the jaws clamped down on my body.

Just as I hoped, the attack makes the arch taratect stumble, loosening its grip for just a moment.

I seize the chance to hit the arch in the face with more magic and escape from its claws.

To my surprise, the attack seems to have weakened the arch more than I thought.

I guess it doesn't have Dragon Scales or anything like that to ward off magic.

That skill is what's prevented me from doing major damage to a dragon with a single attack in the past, but I guess without it, even stats equal to a dragon's won't protect an arch taratect from a big hit.

That's only the defense side of things, though.

As far as attacking goes, the arch has stats and skills that are easily on par with the powerful Araba's.

It might not have the power to cause a huge catastrophe like Mother does, but it's still enough to do some serious damage to a corner of the labyrinth like Araba did.

And there are five of those powerful creatures here.

Isn't that a bit of overkill?

I guess that just shows how seriously Mother is trying to kill me.

And I have to say, that plan seems to be going pretty well for her right now.

Mother's breath attack decimated part of my body, the arch's fangs put holes in the rest of it, and now poison is eating away at me, too.

It's enough to make you wonder how I'm even still alive at this point, honestly.

Well, I know why. It's thanks to Perseverance.

My HP already hit 0 a long time ago.

However, the Perseverance skill can substitute MP for HP.

As soon as my MP runs out, I'm dead.

Thanks to Height of Occultism, my MP regenerates faster than it can go down, so I'm not going to die that easily.

However, that doesn't mean my wounds are going to heal anytime soon.

Perseverance really just passes off my MP as HP to delay the inevitable.

If I take enough damage that I can't move anymore, I'm sure the archs will damage me faster than my MP can recover.

I'll be beaten to a pulp.

Or maybe just devoured.

Even Perseverance can't do much if my body itself is gone.

I'm already just a step away from that line.

And I have no time to think about recovery, because all five archs are coming to attack me.

I definitely can’t worry about appearances now.

I dodge the oncoming archs and run for my life.

Instead of going down to the ground crawling with countless spiders, I use Dimensional Maneuvering to flee through the air.

Without all my legs, I can’t reach my usual speed.

Filled with fear and frustration, I intercept the huge amount of thread coming up at me with thread of my own.

My destination is the Middle Stratum.

I might not be overly fond of the place, but the spider army is even weaker to the heat there than I am.

The fiery environment of the Middle Stratum is terrible for spiders without resistance.

An arch or greater taratect can probably endure it, but anything weaker than that would probably die from simply being there.

But they’re still one step ahead of me. As I race toward the entrance to the Middle Stratum, something stands in my way.

It looks almost like a doll.

No, I think it actually is a doll.

It has a smooth, faceless head.

An inorganic body with spherical joints.

The obstacle resembles a mannequin that could be found at any department store.

Here in the labyrinth, something so obviously artificial seems strangely out of place.

But it makes sense once you know what’s inside.

Appraisal reveals to me that the doll is full of thread, with a tiny spider at the center.

And this spider is a horrifying monster whose stats all exceed 10,000.

According to Appraisal, this is a puppet taratect.

But I've never heard of such a creature.

Even the evolution tree that Wisdom showed me didn't contain any monster by that name.

But my instincts tell me that this mysterious monster must be one of Mother's trump cards.

The humanoid doll readies the swords in its hands.

All six of them.

Though the doll looks like a human being, it has six arms.

If you include the legs, that makes eight limbs: just like a spider.

While I'm being distracted by such a stupid observation, the six swords come at me.

Unable to dodge, I feel it summarily cut off my two front legs.

Monsters shouldn't use weapons, dammit! I want to shout.

I don't know if you stole them from humans or made them yourself, but that's just not fair!

One would be all right, but six swords at once? How am I supposed to avoid that?

I've almost never lost to anyone in terms of speed.

The only exceptions would be Mother; the earth dragon Araba, which I encountered early on; and the fire dragon Rend.

With my amazing speed, Thought Super-Acceleration, and Future Sight, I've always been proud of my evasion abilities.

But now I've been outdone at the one thing I do best.

Thought Super-Acceleration and Future Sight can theoretically figure out how best to dodge something instantly, but that works only if I can get my body to do it in practice.

If the attack moves faster than my body can react, of course there's no way I

can dodge it.

I promptly use magic to knock back the doll, but the situation is only worsening.

The puppet spider in front of me, five archs behind me.

On top of that, I've lost half my legs, leaving my body in tatters and my mobility drastically low.

I can feel death closing in on me, even more keenly than the time I faced Araba.

I don't want to die.



I don’t want to die.

I don’t want to die!

I can’t just give up!

I’ll claw my way toward survival for all I’m worth, until my very last moment!

If I am gonna die here, I’m taking as many of them down with me as I can!

Half-crazed with desperation, I still try to check myself as I fire off a barrage of magic.

My main goal is quantity over quality, so the spells aren’t very powerful.

But since these spiders don’t have the skill Dragon Scales, it should still do decent damage.

Even if it’s not much, I doubt they’ll want to charge right into the line of fire.

Sure enough, the puppet spider and the archs all pause to defend themselves.

They use magic, swords, or whatever else to fend off my attacks.

But the other spiders, who can’t even counterattack my lowest-level magic, start going down from the direct hits.

Oh?

Maybe this desperate strategy could actually work?

While keeping the puppet spider and the archs at bay remains my top priority, I start aiming for the other spiders, too.

Especially the bigger ones that look like they’d be worth more EXP.

The little critters are dying from the aftershocks alone, anyway.

While I’m at it, I switch from Inert Evil Eye, which probably won’t work that well, to Jinx Evil Eye.

Leaving only one eye for Future Sight, I apply Jinx Evil Eye to all the others, stealing MP and such from my enemies.

Then I use that newly restored MP on another barrage of magic.

One of the archs gets fed up and tries to push through the barrage despite the

damage, but instead of trying to counterattack, I only move away.

I definitely can't risk trying to prepare other spells while producing all this magic by myself.

I might be able to ward them off, but I can't completely stop the archs from moving.

Noticing this, the other archs start to charge, too, even if they take damage in the process.

I didn't buy as much time as I had hoped.

If I had even one Parallel Mind available, things would probably be different, but there's no point in thinking about that now.

I'm on my own.

I'm going to have to manage this myself.

I give up on the magic barrage and switch to higher-powered magic, aiming it toward the archs as they charge toward me.

Realizing that this will cause more damage than they're willing to sustain, the archs stop to defend themselves again.

I use that chance to put some distance between us, using slightly weaker magic to fend off the other spiders while I'm at it.

The puppet spider alone moves to the entrance of the Middle Stratum, simply standing there to prevent me from fleeing.

I can't say that's particularly good or bad.

Impatiently, I check my status.

I'm fending off the archs' attacks with magic and thread for now, but I know all too well that I can't keep that up for long.

Given the archs' stats, it's only a matter of time before they push through my pathetic attempts.

Especially since there's five of them.

And that moment comes all too quickly.

One of the archs' sharp claws catches my torso.

As soon as I hit the ground, it pins me down.

Unable to move, I see the other archs closing in.

This is a serious crisis.

But I still have a final ray of hope.

Checking on my tattered body, I look at one of my status items again.

Experience points.

I check the amount I gained from shooting down other spiders while I fended off the archs, then the amount I need to level up.

It's close.

I'm insanely close to the number of points I need, and I'm terrifyingly close to death, too.

It's a gamble, but the only other option is certain death.

I have to try, no matter how terrible the odds.

I quickly Appraise the archs and lock onto the one with the lowest HP.

Annihilating Evil Eye, activate!

This is a skill I gained when I evolved into my current race, Ede Saine.

An insta-kill attack that uses Rot, the attribute associated with death.

Of all my skills, it's currently second only to Abyss Magic in terms of killing power.

However, it comes at a high price: I take a huge amount of recoil damage when I use it.

That amount will be especially severe for my currently beaten-up body.

I'd say the odds of me surviving are about fifty-fifty.

Even if I do live through the self-inflicted damage, there's a follow-up fifty-fifty bet as to whether it'll kill the arch.

And after that, the gamble of whether it'll be enough EXP for me to level up.

My odds of winning all these bets are one in eight at best.

<Experience has reached the required level. Individual Ede Saine has increased from LV 29 to LV 30.>

Looks like I won.

My attack killed the arch, and the resulting EXP raised my level.

I undergo molting, which fully heals my wounds.

The missing part of my torso is restored, and my lost limbs grow back.

However, my HP doesn’t recover completely.

Turns out there’s a limit on how much I can heal by leveling up.

Still, this is a turn for the better. I can even see a chance of pulling through this.

It’s a small one, but it’s there.

The arch that I hit with my Annihilating Evil Eye disintegrates into dust.

This development seems to surprise the one pinning me to the ground, enough that its leg slackens a little.

I use Cutting Thread to slash at my captor’s leg and slip from its hold.

At the same time, I clamber up that leg and latch onto the arch’s torso.

The arch tries to shake me off, but I dig in firmly with my sharp claws and sink my fangs into it.

Moments later, it’s writhing around in agony.

The arch slams its body against the ground, trying to knock me off, but I hang on through sheer determination, continuing to inject it with poison.

The other archs are powerless to intervene, since they can’t attack me without attacking the one I’m stuck to as well.

The arch thrashes around, I hang on, and the other spiders watch, unable to do anything.

The only one to get a clue is the puppet spider, which I probably should’ve expected.

It charges forward, fully prepared to slice me in half even if it means killing the arch, too.

But it's too late.

Time is up.

Long-Distance Teleport, activate.

The puppet's blade swings toward me, but my body disappears just before it reaches me.

My spell moves me into the Middle Stratum with the unlucky arch in tow.

Really, with the arch's obscenely high Status Condition Resistance, my poison would never be enough to kill it.

Biting into it with a Poison Attack was just a way to stall for time.

In those stolen moments, I started preparing the Teleport spell.

My goal in that situation wasn't to wipe out the spider army.

It was ultimately nothing more than survival.

My odds of surviving by fighting to the bitter end were next to nothing.

The four remaining archs would've been enough of a challenge, never mind the puppet spider, which was leagues above all of them.

To be honest, I couldn't have beaten that thing even in a one-on-one situation.

I've got no desire to participate in a battle I can't win.

That's why I focused all my efforts on getting away.

Though I guess I also got this arch as a souvenir.

I release my fangs and grapple with the arch above the magma.

Now the tables have turned.

I have a certain degree of heat resistance, but the arch has none.

Instead, it gets to take the brunt of my anger for putting me in such a deadly position.

A few minutes later, the charred body of the arch drops into the magma, defeated by the Upper Stratum.



The Terror of the Great Elroe Labyrinth

A vaguely unreal scene unfolds in my unfocused vision.

It's as if I'm looking in from the other side of a thin film, like watching an old movie.

The faint light of a torch illuminates the people around me.

Several of them are familiar faces.

I can see Mr. Hyrince and the saint, Yaana.

Two of the other men don't look familiar, but the third one… Isn't that Basgath's son, Goyef?

They keep walking somewhere, until they cross paths with something.

A spider monster: a Nightmare's Vestige.

After a hard fight, the group defeats it. In that moment, I have a strange vision of a girl.

A girl whose features I can't see, who can only be described as white.

I jump to my feet.

Was that a dream?

About when Julius defeated a Nightmare's Vestige in the past?

Did I dream about it because of that conversation with Basgath?

Or was Julius trying to tell me something?

That last idea is probably just wishful thinking on my part.

Absently, I touch the white scarf wrapped around my neck, a memento of my brother.

“We’re about to enter the large passage. Keep yer wits about yeh.”

With that, Mr. Basgath leads us forward.

Once I cross the threshold, I stare around me in surprise.

It’s huge.

Sure, I was briefed on this already, but it’s totally different from the cramped passages we’ve been traveling in all this time.

It could easily be three hundred feet wide.

The ceiling looks equally high.

Just like Basgath said, it’s more like a vast hall than a passage.

But my shock lasts only for a moment.

I quickly return to my senses, looking around carefully.

No signs of any monsters nearby.

Relieved, I still keep my guard up as we move forward.

The passage is enormous.

But there are large boulders and such scattered about, impeding our vision.

Something could be lurking in the shadows of the rocks.

I keep an eye out for any signs as we steadily progress.

After a while, Basgath pauses.

“What’s wrong?”

“It’s strange. I haven’t seen any monsters.”

Basgath’s voice and expression can’t quite hide his consternation.

Is that really such a bad thing?

“Are there usually more around here?”

“Aye. It’s strange that we’ve not seen any after coming this far.”

Under his breath, he adds, “It’s like when we saw the Nightmare.”

Now that makes me nervous.

“Is there any way to reach a different route?”

It’s probably best to assume that something strange is going on.

In which case, we should take precautions.

“There’s a side path a short distance ahead. We’ll switch to another route there.”

Basgath seems to agree, as he doesn’t hesitate to craft an alternate plan.

We all catch on to Basgath’s agitated state, and no one objects to this.

But we made our decision a little too late.

Something is already coming this way.

A dragon.

First, we see a silhouette that resembles a slimmed-down tyrannosaurus.

However, its hands are strangely large, and each of its claws glitters like a flawlessly crafted sword.

“An earth dragon. Damn! And in the Upper Stratum—does that mean it evolved?!”

Basgath clicks his tongue.

All of us get ready for battle.

Steeling myself, I Appraise our opponent.

<Earth dragon Ekisa LV 2

Status:

HP: 2,808/2,808 (green) MP: 1,312/1,312 (blue)

SP: 3,655/3,655 (yellow) : 2,032/3,645 (red)

Average Offensive Ability: 2,498 (details) Average Defensive Ability: 2,455 (details)

Average Magical Ability: 1,298 (details) Average Resistance Ability: 2,452 (details)

Average Speed Ability: 3,600 (details)

Skills:

[Earth Dragon LV 1]	[Imperial Scales LV 4]	[Hard Armor LV 1]	[Steel Body LV 1]
[HP Rapid Recovery LV 1]	[MP Recovery Speed LV 1]	[MP Lessened Consumption LV 1]	[Magic Power Perception LV 3]
[Magic Power Operation LV 3]	[Magic Power Attack LV 1]	[SP Rapid Recovery LV 2]	[SP Minimized Consumption LV 2]
[Terrain Attack LV 5]	[Terrain Enhancement LV 5]	[Destruction Enhancement LV 7]	[Cutting Super-Enhancement LV 6]
[Piercing Super-Enhancement LV 6]	[Impact Super-Enhancement LV 6]	[Dimensional Maneuvering LV 3]	[Hit LV 10]
[Evasion LV 10]	[Probability Correction LV 4]	[Danger Perception LV 7]	[Presence Perception LV 7]
[Heat Perception LV 7]	[Motion Perception LV 5]	[Earth Magic LV 1]	[Destruction Resistance LV 2]
[Cutting Resistance LV 5]	[Piercing Resistance LV 5]	[Impact Resistance LV 6]	[Shock Resistance LV 2]
[Terrain Nullification]	[Lightning Resistance LV 7]	[Status Condition Super-Resistance LV 2]	[Rot Resistance LV 1]
[Pain Nullification]	[Pain Mitigation LV 4]	[Night Vision LV 10]	[Vision Expansion LV 5]
[Vision Enhancement LV 5]	[Auditory Enhancement LV 4]	[Olfactory Enhancement LV 4]	[Longevity LV 7]
[Magic Hoard LV 1]	[Ultimate Movement LV 1]	[Fortune LV 1]	[Herculean Strength LV 5]
[Sturdy LV 5]	[Monk LV 1]	[Talisman LV 5]	[Skanda LV 1]

Skill Points: 19,500

Titles:

[Monster Slayer] [Monster Slaughterer] [Dragon] [Champion]

>

High stats.

Especially its overwhelming speed.

“This thing is fast, everyone. Be careful!” I shout.

At the same time, the earth dragon lunges forward.

Hyrince’s shield catches its claws as they swing down.

“Geh?!”

His face distorts with pain.

But thanks to his quick reaction, the dragon stops in place for a moment.

Basgath and I waste no time in slashing at its left and right feet respectively.

Katia and Ms. Oka unleash their magic on it, too.

Katia’s Flame Magic burns the dragon’s face, and Ms. Oka’s Wind Magic knocks it off its feet.

The dragon shrieks in pain and tumbles backward.

However, the actual damage is minimal.

My sword sliced about halfway through its right leg.

But Basgath’s cut barely made a scratch on its left.

He couldn’t break through its tough defenses.

The dragon rises again.

Its face is free of burns, despite taking a direct hit of Flame Magic.

“This doesn’t look good,” Basgath mutters.

His face is covered in sweat.

My hands are sweating, too, in response to the unexpectedly powerful defense of our opponent.

I had intended to cut its leg clean off with that attack.

Instead, I only ended up with a strike that was too shallow.

In fact, I nearly lost my grip on my sword because of all that resistance.

Magic barely has any effect, either.

The Imperial Scales skill dramatically reduces the impact of magic.

Katia and Ms. Oka are some of the strongest magic users of their races.

But the earth dragon is utterly unfazed by their attacks.

Still, it's not as though it didn't do any damage whatsoever.

This opponent isn't unbeatable.

Then the dragon leaps from the ground.

Despite having no wings, it easily moves through the air.

It's using Dimensional Maneuvering.

And its eyes are fixed directly on Anna, who is hovering at the back of our party.

Anna activates some magic.

But her electric attack doesn't cause any damage.

The earth dragon has Lightning Resistance.

On top of its already high magic resistance, Lightning Magic doesn't stand a chance.

Hyrince throws himself between the charging dragon and Anna.

His shield blocks the earth dragon's claws.

Just like before.

This time, however, the dragon doesn't pause, instead opting to retreat immediately.

We can't keep up fast enough to strike back.

“Lightning won’t work—it has resistance! Same for Earth! Switch to other attributes! Katia, you stick with magic! Basgath, you also use magic to distract it!”

I quickly relay information to the others.

It has resistance to physical attacks, too, but there’s nothing we can do about that.

If Basgath’s strength wasn’t enough to cause any damage, then only myself and one other person will be able to reduce its HP with physical attacks.

“Hiyah!”

That other person is Fei, who just punched the earth dragon in the face.

Its enormous body flies back almost comically, rolling along the ground.

I’m sure I’m not the only one who pauses dumbstruck for a moment.

Katia often accuses me of being a cheater, but isn’t Fei the real cheater here?

The earth dragon stands up, glowers at Fei, and runs toward her with a roar.

Its claws swing toward her.

Fei raises her arms to defend herself.

Her arms sparkle a metallic white, but it’s no illusion.

It’s a skill called Steel Body, which hardens the user’s body like metal.

Since she also has Hard Armor, which toughens the skin, Fei’s defense is even higher than her stats imply.

Whether she’s in human form or not, she’s still a light dragon who was originally a defense-oriented earth wyrm.

A dragon who can square off with another dragon.

Even the earth dragon seems surprised to have its attack blocked head-on, and it pauses for a moment.

Seeing this, Ms. Oka activates her magic.

A vortex of wind engulfs the earth dragon.

This spell isn’t intended to cause damage.

It’s intended to hold the dragon in place.

Binding Wind, a Gale Magic spell.

The earth dragon struggles to escape.

With its Imperial Scales, it won’t be contained for long.

Katia’s Flame Magic strikes next.

It merges with Ms. Oka’s Binding Wind, forming a tornado of flame around the earth dragon.

The earth dragon howls in pain.

Anna pummels it with more Wind Magic, and Basgath uses Dark Magic.

Hyrince seizes the chance to use Healing Magic on himself.

The earth dragon’s attack damaged him, even with his shield protecting him.

The dragon’s HP is steadily decreasing.

But then it shakes off the flame tornado.

The shine of a charging breath attack gathers in its maw.

As my friends catch their breath, I step in front of them.

My magic collides with the dragon’s breath.

The spell I use is the level-7 Holy Light Magic spell.

Its rather uncool name is Holy Light Beam.

But in spite of the cheesy title, it’s quite powerful.

The ray of light forces the dragon’s breath back into its mouth.

Its jaw snaps, and the earth dragon’s body slowly hits the ground.

The dragon’s HP has reached 0.

<Experience has reached the required level. Schlain Zagan Analeit has increased from LV 28 to LV 29.> <All basic attributes have increased.>

<Skill proficiency level-up bonus acquired.> <Skill points acquired.>

<Condition satisfied. Acquired title [Dragon Slayer].> <Acquired skills [Lifeblood LV 1] [Dragon Power LV 1] as a result of title [Dragon Slayer].> <[Lifeblood LV 1] has been integrated into [Lifeblood LV 6].> <Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Lifeblood LV 6] has become [Lifeblood LV 7].>

It looks like I gained a title by defeating the dragon.

“Dragon Slayer? Well, I suppose we’re proper legends now.”

Katia chuckles.

Apparently, everyone who participated in the battle got the title, not just the person who dealt the finishing blow.

“Whew. So we managed to slay a dragon… I didn’t know how that’d go, to be honest.”

Basgath cautiously approaches the earth dragon’s corpse.

“Any of yeh mind if I take this thing?”

“No, please do.”

Monster parts can have all kinds of uses.

Dragons are considered especially valuable.

Since Basgath has a Spatial Storage item, he can carry even the largest of carcasses.

The dragon corpse is sucked into Basgath’s bag.

“Was that the most dangerous monster in the large passage?”

“Don’t be stupid. A big-shot monster like this normally wouldn’t be here at all. The most difficult monster in the large passage oughta be an earth wyrm, a rank below this thing. More than likely, this thing was an earth wyrm that evolved.”

“Yeah. Its level was pretty low.”

“Exactly. I’d bet we didn’t see any other monsters because this guy was runnin’ around eating ’em all.”

When monsters gain a lot of experience, they sometimes evolve.

This means they become a higher-class monster and revert to level 1.

And monsters that have recently evolved become very hungry and belligerent.

The dragon was a low level, and its SP was already reduced at the start of the fight.

That means it had probably evolved not too long ago.

“Dragon Slayer, eh? Guess I only ever fought wyrms with Julius and the others. That’ll make a nice souvenir to show off to them in the next life…”

Hyrince laughs bleakly.

“We were only able to win because you blocked its attack.”

“Blocking was all I could manage. But I guess I did my job as a tank.”

“Yes, very much so. That’s why there weren’t any casualties. Thank you.”

“No need to thank me. It’s what I’m here for. Besides, you’re the one who finished it off. Good job, kid.”

Hyrince ruffles my hair a bit roughly.

“Cut it out, please!”

I laugh as I dodge away from his hand.

Having defeated a powerful enemy, we all start to relax a little.

Then a chill runs down my spine.

I turn around.

Something else returns my gaze.

Eight glittering eyes, looking down at us from on top of a rock.

A monster known as a Nightmare’s Vestige.

There it stands, on top of the boulder.

Its bloodred eyes are fixed on me coldly.

It isn’t particularly large.

But it has a greater presence than any monster we’ve faced so far.

I can’t move.

Neither can anyone else.

It's like we're frozen in place, unable to even tremble.

The white spider monster seems to have its claws around our hearts.

"Hero?"

Suddenly, I hear a voice.

But not in the form of sound.

Telepathy.

It wasn't directed at me.

I just happen to be overhearing it on its way to someone else.

"Hero."

Then, suddenly, that someone else is here.

Not just here. It's everywhere.

"Ruler?"

"Ruler." "Ruler." "Ruler." "Ruler." "Ruler." "Ruler."

"Cannot be Appraised?"

"Cannot be Appraised." "Cannot be Appraised." "Cannot be Appraised." "Cannot be Appraised." "Cannot be Appraised." "Cannot be Appraised."

"Ruler?"

"Ruler." "Ruler." "Ruler." "Ruler." "Ruler." "Ruler."

"Reincarnation?"

"Reincarnation." "Reincarnation." "Reincarnation." "Reincarnation." "Reincarnation." "Reincarnation."

"But they're weak?"

"Weak." "Weak." "Weak." "Weak." "Weak." "Weak."

"Weak. Weak." "Weak. Weak." "Weak. Weak." "Weak. Weak." "Weak. Weak." "Weak. Weak."

The telepathic voice echoes all around.

Then they appear, on the floor, on the wall, on the ceiling, everywhere.

Red eyes, tons of them.

Then white, filling up my vision.

The bizarre spectacle forces my thoughts to grind to a halt.

No, I have to think.

They're using language for a specific purpose—they must be.

And one particular word stands out.

"You know about reincarnations?!"

I steady my resolve and speak.

Basgath's eyes widen, but I had to ask, no matter what.

"We do." "We do."

"Of course we do."

The answer is immediate.

We're communicating with each other.

These things aren't monsters that lack intelligence.

"Why do you know that?"

"Master." "Master."

"Mother." "Mother."

"Is this 'Master' a reincarnation?"

"You'll know soon enough."

"You'll find out soon enough."

"You'll find out."

"You'll know."

"What do you mean?"

"Proclamation."

“Pronouncement.”

“The beginning of the end.”

“The world begins.”

“The world ends.”

The white shadows gradually disappear.

“Please, wait! What does that mean?!”

“You don’t need to know.”

“You’ll die anyway.”

“Everyone will die.”

“Just struggle to survive.”

Implicitly, I felt like they were saying, *We’ll let you live until then*.

With that, the Nightmare’s Vestiges disappear.

“You fool!”

Basgath’s fist strikes my face.

I accept the punch with resignation.

Basgath tries to strike me again, but Hyrince grabs him and holds him back.

“I told yeh, didn’t I? If yeh see a Nightmare’s Vestige, don’t do anything!”

Even in a choke hold, Basgath is still yelling with rage.

At this rate, he might even shake off Hyrince and come at me again.

“Now, now.” Ms. Oka steps in. “We still got through safely, didn’t we?”

Basgath reluctantly stops struggling.

He still seems angry, but at least there’s no sign he’ll become violent again.

“I’m sorry. I just had to ask.”

“Even if it killed yeh?”

Basgath glares at me.

I don’t know how to respond.

“If yeh want to die, that’s yer choice, boy. But not if yeh get others involved, too. Die alone if that’s what yeh want.”

“Basgath, that’s going too far.”

Ms. Oka scolds him, but I think he’s right.

I made a selfish choice while dealing with the dangerous Nightmare’s Vestiges simply because I was too curious.

Basgath pushes Hyrince away.

Perhaps judging that he won’t strike me anymore, Hyrince releases him.

Immediately, Basgath staggers over to a rock some ways away, leans against it, and slides to the ground.

Looking closer, I realize that his face is pale.

Basgath did say that he encountered the Nightmare a long time ago.

Maybe that encounter traumatized him.

Looking around at the others, I see that Katia and Anna have dropped to their knees, and Hyrince looks a little pale.

Even Fei’s expression is stiff.

Our teacher is the only one who appears calm.

“Are you all right?”

I address Katia and Anna first.

“I can’t seem to stand at the moment.”

“I’m so ashamed…”

They both look almost on the verge of tears.

Judging by the goose bumps on their skin, they are a little grossed out as well as terrified.

Even if they were comparatively small for monsters, we were still essentially surrounded by giant spiders.

It makes sense that the girls would be distressed. I’m disturbed as well.

“If they’d attacked us, do you think you could’ve handled it, Fei?”

“I…don’t think so.”

Fei responds to my question uncertainly.

“One of them probably would’ve been fine, but with such a huge number of them, I’m not so sure.”

“I figured.”

If there was only one, even I might have been able to handle it.

I didn’t Appraise them, of course, so I don’t know their exact stats, but they certainly seemed at least as strong as that earth dragon, if not stronger.

Since Fei was able to hold her own against the earth dragon, maybe she could’ve fought off a Nightmare’s Vestige, too.

But that’s assuming there was only one of them.

Against a group so large that I couldn’t even count them all, winning would probably be impossible.

Which is why carelessly speaking to the Nightmare’s Vestige in that situation was a reckless act that put everyone’s lives in danger.

I have no right to complain about Basgath hitting me.

As our guide, he’s in charge of keeping all of us safe. There’s no way he could let my selfish decision slide.

“You certainly seem calm, don’t you?”

The color starting to return to her face, Katia raises her eyebrows at Ms. Oka.

“Hmm? I wouldn’t say that. Sure, they were cute on the outside, but I didn’t like their tone one bit.”

“Cute…?”

Wow. So she actually did think that.

Ms. Oka always had unusual tastes, even in our old lives.

At the time, I thought it was just for show, but apparently she really does like spiders and stuff.

Surprising.

“By the way, what do you think of what they were saying?”

The Nightmare’s Vestiges spoke in nothing but repetitive riddles.

“I don’t know. We don’t have enough information.”

First of all, what exactly are those monsters we call the “Nightmare’s Vestiges”?

They seemed to know a thing or two about us, meaning they must have a high-level Appraisal skill.

More importantly, they were intelligent enough to understand human language.

Not to mention stealthy enough to gather in such a large number without our noticing.

They also worked together seamlessly, even going as far as using Telepathy.

How could mere fragments be this powerful?

It doesn’t make sense to consider them ordinary monsters.

What in the world are they?

What is their connection to the monster known as the “Nightmare” that was around when they first appeared?

“The beginning of the end. Everyone will die…”

Those ominous, nightmarish words.

They stay in my mind, repeating over and over.

SCHLAIN ZAGAN ANALEIT



Born to a concubine of the king of the Analeit Kingdom, Schlain is the fourth prince. He is a reincarnation who retains his memories of his life as a Japanese high school student. In his previous life, his name was Shun Yamada. At the time, he was an ordinary young man, but he has shown incredible capabilities in his current life, leading him to be known as a child prodigy. His half sister, Suresia, was born around the same time to the true queen, so they were raised like twins. He looked up to his older brother Julius, the hero, and has resolved to carry on in his footsteps. He is personally averse to fighting, but the times he lives in and a number of other incidents have forced him onto the battlefield.

So I'm a Spider, So What?
SHUN
Character
Collection



EVOLUTION

Once the arch taratect has been dealt with, I check to make sure my surroundings are safe before I breathe a sigh of relief.

I survived!

Boy, that was rough.

I thought being chased down by Mother was bad enough, but then I got ambushed as soon as I escaped?

Just how badly does she want to kill me?

I mean, she's seriously out for blood.

If this were a game, it'd get scathing reviews for being too hard.

It's like if the final boss spawned just as you were entering the first real area, and when you ran away, you got attacked by a bunch of mini-bosses at once.

Unreal.

At this point, my sheer exhaustion outweighs my excitement about surviving.

Both physically and mentally speaking.

I've definitely resigned myself to death quite a few times by now, but this was the closest call yet.

I even used Annihilating Evil Eye, which I'd considered off-limits because of its self-destructive nature, on a gamble where my odds of surviving were far lower.

I've had my share of situations where a single hit would kill me, but nothing like what just happened, where death closed in on me from all sides.

I think the closest I've come before that was when I fell to the Lower Stratum

and got stung by that bee, or when I fought Araba.

Being one hit away from a death that could come at any moment is scary, but being slowly backed into a corner with no way out? Waaay worse.

Seriously, no more of that, please.

Well, that crisis is over, at least for now.

My current location is a magma lake about halfway through the Middle Stratum.

Given their weakness to fire, those other spiders won't chase me this far. I hope.

I mean, even the arch's HP decreased just by being here, which means any taratects weaker than that would probably die in a flash.

The biggest problem is that weird new puppet spider.

That thing might actually be able to function in the Middle Stratum.

Man, what was up with that freak?

Since it's nowhere on my evolution chart from Professor Wisdom, it must be some special evolution that's not part of the normal taratect line.

Maybe it's a mutation or something? Either way, that's one ace I wish they'd kept in the hole.

It might not be quite as horrifying as Mother, but since its stats are above 10,000, I definitely don't see myself winning that fight.

It was bad enough that it prevented me from fleeing and all, but if it had been that thing actively attacking me instead of the archs, I would've been in big trouble.

If the archs had blocked the passage instead, while the puppet spider finished me off…

Oh yeah, I'd be dead.

That's the only miscalculation Mother made.

And it was that tiny error that saved my ass.

That was still the worst predicament I've been in yet, though.

So what should I do now?

First of all, I'd like to know what Mother is up to.

I tried checking in with my Parallel Minds that are totally rocking their spirit battle with Mother, but it seemed like there was some blockage partway through.

Our connection hasn't been cut, but something is interfering with our communication.

My connection with Mother is fading, too.

My guess is that Mother was able to track my actions perfectly because she was using her Kin Control skill to spy on me.

It was when I first noticed that skill's influence that I decided to use it to launch a counterattack on Mother. It makes sense that it would still be connecting us.

I had let my guard down about it because she couldn't control me, but she must have been able to use it to watch me.

And if that connection is weakening now, does that mean Mother can't see me anymore, either?

If that's the case, then she might attack again if the connection recovers.

She'd figure out where I am.

But to put it another way, that means she probably doesn't know where I am right now. Maybe I can relax a little.

This is all just an educated guess, though, so I'd better not put too much faith in it.

Still, maybe this means I shouldn't use Clairvoyance to check on Mother.

I'm afraid it'd attract her attention.

For now, if I just stay put, it should buy me a few days at least.

If my Parallel Minds can defeat Mother in that time, then it'll all be over.

Even if not, I don't stand a chance of beating her in person. Running away is my only option.

Now I know how criminals feel when they're on the run.

I'm scared of the spider police.

Well, let's just focus on what I can do for now.

When I defeated the arch earlier, I went up to level 30.

And now the words Evolution Available have appeared in my status.

Heh-heh-heh. That's right. I can evolve again!

This is the last step I need before my evolutionary goal, arachne.

I have only one option: Zana Horowa.

As far as I can tell from the evolutionary tree, this species is on the same level as Mother.

Still, considering my evolutions so far, I'm guessing my stats aren't going to suddenly jump way up or anything.

Just evolving won't suddenly make me Mother's equal.

For one thing, even if our species are on par with each other, Mother is level 89.

I'd have to evolve and grind my way up to level 89 to compete with that.

Still, if I evolve, my stats will probably go up at least a little, and maybe I'll get some new skills, too.

Although at this point, the only skills I've gotten from evolving are things like Rot Attack and Annihilating Evil Eye, which are super-strong but do tons of damage to me, too!

I'll be totally unprotected when I evolve, but all the other monsters in the area ran off somewhere while I was beating the crap out of the arch, so that isn't a problem.

Not so long ago, it was a life-threatening risk to evolve here, but now monsters all run away from me of their own accord.

That kinda sucks, in that it makes it difficult to secure food, but at times like this, I'm grateful for it.

Let's get evolving!

<Individual Ede Saine will evolve into Zana Horowa.>

Yes.

My consciousness…doesn't fade like it normally would.

Huh?

What's up with that?

Oh, maybe it's Exhaustion Nullification?

That's a skill I got with my Ruler of Sloth title.

Not only does it cancel out Sleep-attribute attacks; it also prevents the negative effects of not sleeping.

I can stay up twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, with no penalties to show for it.

Plus, I can still sleep normally when I want. It's a pretty handy skill.

I'm guessing it's also the reason why I'm not passing out when I evolve now.

So…this is evolution, huh?

It feels pretty weird.

It doesn't hurt or itch or anything, but it's kinda like my body is being remodeled from the inside out.

Like I'm turning into something totally different.

But weirdly, it doesn't feel bad or scary.

<Evolution completed.>

<Species changed to Zana Horowa.>

<All basic attributes have increased.>

<Skill proficiency evolutionary bonus acquired.>

Then a whole bunch of my skills level up.

Ooh.

I knew evolving would improve my skills and all, but hearing them listed off like this really drives home how many there are.

<Acquired skill [Immortality] as a result of evolution.> <Skill points acquired.>

Hmm?

Hmmmm?

Excuuuuuse me?!

Did I just hear what I think I just heard?

Wait.

What did you say I got?

<Immortality: User will no longer die within the system.>

Whaaaaaaat?!

Are you sure about that?!

How is this even allowed?!

How stupid can that D weirdo get to just give me a skill like this?!

We're talking about the ultimate cheat skill that people have pursued throughout time and space!

Ohhh man! Now we're talkin'!

If I can't die, doesn't that mean I can just charge on up to Mother if I want to?

We're talking about immortality here!

I can get stomped on, hit with a breath attack, or blasted to smithereens by magic, and I still won't die.

I'll just keep attacking like a zombie.

Even an all-powerful monster like Mother would run out of strength eventually if she fought an enemy who never dies.

Bwa-ha-ha!

Who knew evolving would just casually solve all my problems?!

If just evolving into this race gives you such an overpowered skill, no wonder it said it's on the same level as Mother.

Whew.

Anyway, I'd better eat to recover the red stamina I lost in evolution.

Munching on the dead arch, I open my status.

<Zana Horowa LV 1 Nameless

Status:

HP: 4,293/4,293 (green) +1,800 (details)

SP: 2,873/2,873 (yellow) (details)

Average Offensive Ability: 2,833 (details)

Average Magical Ability: 12,599 (details)

Average Speed Ability: 8,361 (details)

MP: 13,292/13,292 (blue) +1,800 (details)

: 1,445/2,873 (red)

+0 (details)

Average Defensive Ability: 2,904 (details)

Average Resistance Ability: 12,545 (details)

Skills:

[HP Rapid Recovery LV 9]	[Height of Occultism]	[Magic Divinity LV 3]	[Magic Power Conferment LV 8]
[Magic Attack LV 1]	[SP Rapid Recovery LV 2]	[SP Minimized Consumption LV 2]	[Destruction Enhancement LV 7]
[Cutting Enhancement LV 5]	[Status Condition Super-Enhancement LV 2]	[Battle Divinity LV 1]	[Energy Conferment LV 6]
[Dragon Power LV 8]	[Deadly Poison Attack LV 7]	[Rot Attack LV 5]	[Heretic Attack LV 6]
[Poison Synthesis	[Medicine Synthesis LV 8]	[Thread Genius LV	[Utility Thread LV 7]

LV 10]		1]	
[Thread Control LV 10]	[Telekinesis LV 3]	[Throw LV 10]	[Expel LV 4]
[Dimensional Maneuvering LV 9]	[Concentration LV 10]	[Thought Acceleration LV 1]	[Future Sight LV 1]
[Parallel Minds LV 8]	[High-Speed Processing LV 7]	[Hit LV 10]	[Evasion LV 10]
[Probability Correction LV 7]	[Stealth LV 10]	[Camouflage LV 3]	[Silence LV 9]
[Tyrant LV 2]	[Conviction]	[Hades]	[Corruption]
[Immortality]	[Heresy Magic LV 10]	[Wind Magic LV 7]	[Earth Magic LV 10]
[Terrain Magic LV 3]	[Shadow Magic LV 10]	[Dark Magic LV 10]	[Black Magic LV 5]
[Poison Magic LV 10]	[Healing Magic LV 10]	[Spatial Magic LV 10]	[Dimensional Magic LV 5]
[Abyss Magic LV 10]	[Perseverance]	[Pride]	[Wrath LV 4]
[Satiation LV 8]	[Sloth]	[Wisdom]	[Destruction Resistance LV 6]
[Impact Resistance LV 7]	[Cutting Resistance LV 7]	[Piercing Resistance LV 2]	[Flame Resistance LV 3]
[Wind Resistance LV 4]	[Earth Resistance LV 9]	[Heavy Super-Resistance LV 2]	[Status Condition Nullification]
[Acid Resistance LV 7]	[Rot Resistance LV 8]	[Faint Resistance LV 6]	[Fear Super-Resistance LV 1]
[Heresy Nullification]	[Pain Nullification]	[Pain Super-Mitigation LV 5]	[Vision Enhancement LV 10]
[Clairvoyance LV 8]	[Jinx Evil Eye LV 7]	[Inert Evil Eye LV 6]	[Repellent Evil Eye LV 3]

[Annihilating Evil Eye LV 5]	[Five Senses Super-Enhancement LV 2]	[Perception Expansion LV 6]	[Divinity Expansion LV 7]
[Celestial Power]	[Ultimate Life LV 3]	[Instant Body LV 8]	[Endurance LV 8]
[Fortitude LV 3]	[Stronghold LV 3]	[Skanda LV 7]	[Demon Lord LV 5]
[Taboo LV 10]	[n% I = W]		

Skill Points: 3,600

Titles:

[Foul Feeder]	[Kin Eater]	[Assassin]	[Monster Slayer]
[Poison Technique User]	[Thread User]	[Merciless]	[Monster Slaughterer]
[Ruler of Pride]	[Ruler of Perseverance]	[Ruler of Wisdom]	[Wyrm Slayer]
[Fearbringer]	[Dragon Slayer]	[Ruler of Sloth]	[Monster Calamity]
[Champion]			

>

Hmm.

Yeah, my stats didn't really go up that drastically.

Just like with my previous evolutions, it's not much more than a regular level-up.

My magic stats are still the only area that exceeds 10,000, with speed being the next highest.

Aside from Immortality, the most noteworthy new skill is probably Status Condition Nullification.

Also, I was too distracted by Immortality to hear it, but it looks like I got some title called Champion when I evolved.

I got the Status Condition Resistance skill with it, but then I guess all my

related skills, like Poison Resistance and Exhaustion Nullification, got merged into it, so it made it all the way to Nullification at once.

<Champion: Acquire skills [Destruction Enhancement LV 1] [Status Condition Resistance LV 1]. Acquisition condition: be recognized as a champion. Effect: inflicts the Heresy-attribute effect "Fear" on anyone who sees the holder. Explanation: a title awarded to those worthy of being champions.>

Good for you, spider! Now you're even scarier!

At this point, just looking at me would probably be enough to make a fainthearted person (or monster) pass out on the spot.

And what does "recognized as a champion" mean anyway?

Recognized by whom?

"By an administrator, of course."

The voice is beautiful yet somehow deeply unsettling.

I look around and notice that there's a smartphone lying right at my feet.

That's where the voice that answered my inner thoughts is coming from.

This seems familiar. In fact, I've seen a smartphone in this world only once, so there's no mistake.

This must be the self-styled "evil god" D.

Yeah, let's just pretend I didn't see it.

Nope. I didn't see a thing. I'm not listening.

"Hello? This is D."

La-la-laaa…

I can't heeear you.

"Oh, that's odd. Who put this spider self-destruct button in my hand?"

I'm sorry—please forgive me!

Wait, what kind of button is that anyway?!

When did you even make that?!

“I’m joking. I don’t have anything of the sort. I don’t need any help to turn you into a ghastly fireworks display if I feel like it, after all.”

Uhhh…yikes.

That doesn’t exactly make me feel any better.

“Don’t you worry. I would never waste a hilarious up-and-coming talent like you.”

Oh, is that right?

Gosh, what an honor.

Well, good talking to you.

“Activate self-destruct?”

I’m sorry!

“Come on, I’m joking. Lighten up.”

It’s hard to tell when you’re joking if your voice is totally monotone the whole time, y’know.

“Yes, I get that a lot.”

What do you actually want?

“I just wanted to congratulate you. For attaining immortality.”

Oh. Thanks.

Hey, why did you make a skill like that anyway?

“What do you think people ultimately aim for when they’ve been satisfied?”

Huh?

“Wealth, fame, power, authority, and, of course, agelessness or immortality. That’s all people ever want, no matter what world they’re from. And if they learned that they could actually get it, what do you think they would do?”

Whatever it takes to get a hold of it, I guess.

Ohhh, so that’s it.

“Precisely. People love to strive for something, even if they know they’ll never

reach it. They'll sacrifice anything. Then they'll try, and try, and ultimately expire without ever getting what they want. And we administrators will be happy to accept the delicious fruits of their labors. It's really quite efficient, don't you agree?"

Man, are you ever a creep.

"I am an evil god, after all."

Then why'd you let me actually get my hands on it, then?

"Well, Zana Horowa is supposed to be an undead monster of sorts. I never imagined any individual would actually evolve into it, however."

Hey, wait a sec.

Does that mean I shouldn't have picked it?

"No, I certainly wouldn't say that. It's simply that the prior step, Zoa Ele, is already quite rare and has also been designed to die before it evolves."

Huh? What's that mean?

"The Zoa Ele evolution came with Rot Attack, remember? However, it did not come with Rot Resistance."

Huh? Really?

"Indeed. Thus, if a normal Zoa Ele was to use Rot Attack, it would immediately die as well. You're lucky you had Rot Resistance, hmm?"

Yikes!

For real?

I very nearly killed myself, then.

"Thanks to that resistance, you simply lost the ability to use your scythe. Ordinarily, you would have died instantly."

Talk about a defective product.

"The attack kills both yourself and your opponent. That's why the Zoa Ele has come to be known as a symbol of bad luck."

Ahh.

I guess that is pretty unlucky.

Not to mention rude.

“The Ede Saine is the same way, since it gains the even-more-powerful Annihilating Evil Eye. It’s bound to die before evolving.”

Have any of them ever evolved into a Zana Horowa before?

“Not a single one. Congratulations are in order. You’ve become a completely one-of-a-kind monster. Bravo, bravo.”

That’s great and all, but somehow hearing it from you doesn’t make me feel very good about it.

“After I was kind enough to congratulate you?”

I mean, considering your track record so far…y’know?

“Well, I am an evil god.”

Ugh.

Between Taboo and Immortality and all that, you really are the worst.

“I wish you’d phrase that a bit more flatteringly. You could say I’m malice incarnate, for example.”

That’s definitely not gonna happen.

I will say you’re a nasty piece of work, though.

“You don’t think the Taboo system is brilliantly devised?”

Definitely not.

I’m basically an outsider here, so it mostly just makes me uncomfortable, but wouldn’t a normal resident of this world go crazy the second they max out Taboo?

“I suppose the humans who have maxed out Taboo in the past did not meet a particularly pleasant end.”

Yeah, I wouldn’t think so.

“But that’s what makes it Taboo.”

Man, what's wrong with you?

Well, I guess you reap what you sow.

"You don't seem to be in any position to be making such observations."

Oh, right.

I have to deal with Mother somehow, or I'll never see the light of day again.

By which I mostly mean I literally won't be able to go outside.

"Since you don't seem to be very self-aware about it, might I remind you that this attack of yours is not within the system?"

Oh, really?

"At the very least, I have no recollection of implementing a skill that would allow anything like what you're doing right now."

Huh.

Well, I guess I did get the feeling that I wasn't really using a skill to attack Mother with my Parallel Minds.

Wait, does that mean I'm using portions of my divinity field?

"It does indeed."

Heh-heh-heh.

Looks like I'll be becoming a god any day now.

"I'm looking forward to it."

Uh, I was expecting you to have a retort for that, not to just totally blow me off…

"No, I mean it. I am hopeful that you'll manage to reach our field someday."

Seriously?

"Yes."

What is your goal exactly?

"I told you before. Amusement."

Oh yeah.

I guess you did.

“I’m in a good mood today. How would you like me to share some information with you?”

Seriously?!

“Yes. As long as it’s within my ability to tell you, I will be happy to answer any questions you have about this world.”

Wow, for real?

Hmm. What should I ask, then?

Well, first of all, why did I get reincarnated into this world?

“Ah, yes. I’ll give you a detailed explanation, shall I? Let’s start from the beginning. First, you died in Japan on Earth. Are you with me so far?”

Yes.

So I really did die, huh…?

I kinda figured.

“The cause of your death is in fact related to the hero and Demon Lord of the previous age.”

Huh?

Why would heroes and demon lords in this world have any effect on Earth?

“The previous hero and Demon Lord alike were remarkably talented magic users. They altered Dimensional Magic to create a magic that crosses the borders between worlds.”

Is that even possible?

“It certainly is. There’s nothing preventing it. However, the system does not give support for any techniques outside of itself. The inhabitants of this world were too accustomed to having the system’s support and couldn’t control such an advanced rune on their own. As a result, the rune misfired. When it crossed dimensions, it destroyed part of the MA field. Then it broke through the barriers between worlds and unfortunately exploded on Earth, in Japan, in a certain high school classroom.”

Whoa.

Way to cause trouble for other people.

How stupid do you have to be to destroy part of the MA field?

Not to mention getting me killed! Thanks a lot.

“Quite so. I ended up having to reexamine this world’s entire system, which hadn’t been done since it was made.”

Huh?

“I told you, remember? I am an outsider in the world you’re in at present. It’s the other administrators’ jobs to manage it. I did supply the system itself, yes, but I will do nothing more.”

You say that, but you totally interfere all the time.

“I had no choice. Though it was a result of this world’s hero and Demon Lord running rampant, those innocent high school students still got killed and dragged into the system. Being partially responsible myself, I thought it was the least I could do as the system’s creator to help them out a little.”

Hmm?

Partially responsible?

High school students, plural?

“As of now, twenty-five former earthlings have been reincarnated into this world. The entire classroom was brutally destroyed, leaving no survivors. And the souls of the people who were killed by that attack were regurgitated into this world’s system, so they were all reincarnated here. Left to their own devices, their souls would have disintegrated. That’s why I took matters into my own hands and gave them the ‘n% I = W’ skill. With this skill, they would be able to keep the strength, memories, and such of their souls. Then I gave each of them a free skill based on their aptitude and generously ensured that they would be reborn into species with a similar wavelength to their original souls. If you ask me, that was the least I could do.”

Whoa, for real?

So there are others here besides me…

Hmm?

Wait, how many people were in our class again?

There were twenty-five, right?

So if you include our teacher, that makes twenty-six people.

Aren't we one person short?

"Yes. That would be me."

Wait, you?!

Whaaaat?

You were in our class?

"Yes. That's why the magic the hero and Demon Lord created affected that particular classroom."

Whaaat?

Hey, by the way, what's your name?

"That's a secret."

Aw, whaaat?

C'mon, who are you?

I don't remember anyone like you in that class…

"Well, let's not talk about me. The point is, that whole incident occurred because I, the highest administrator of the system, was in that classroom. That is why I take partial responsibility. And so I interfered with this world out of a sense of obligation."

Uh-huh…

So that's why I had Skanda this whole time.

But what about Wisdom?

I got the impression that you were done fulfilling your "obligation" as soon as you got us all reincarnated.

“As I said, that was a reward for your hard work.”

Oh, right.

I suppose I owe you one, then.

Thanks.

“You’re quite welcome.”

So you gave me the whole Wisdom thing and let me max out Taboo, and now you want me to save the world?

“I have said nothing of the sort. You are free to do whatever you wish in this world. I will not stop you, nor will I direct you. I am simply an observer.”

I sure hope so…

“You don’t seem to trust me.”

I mean, you’re an “evil god.”

“True enough.”

Oh, I know.

What were the hero and Demon Lord trying to do with that crazy magic anyway?

“I think perhaps they were trying to defeat me.”

Why?

“It seems they were inclined to think of administrators as the enemy. Perhaps someone else was instigating them.”

Doesn’t that mean they were stupid beyond saving, then?

Ugh.

I can’t believe I died because a couple of morons basically just caused a huge traffic accident.

That’s sooo dumb.

“Well, I’ve done my part, so what you do now that you’ve been reincarnated in a different world is up to you.”

Oh, right.

I guess.

You know, that was a pretty nice thing to do for an evil god.

Seriously, thanks for saving my butt.

“Don’t mention it.”

So who do you think was instigating the hero and Demon Lord?

“It wouldn’t be any fun if I told you that part. You’ll just have to see for yourself.”

Sheesh.

That’s what you won’t tell me?

“Things will be more entertaining that way.”

Rude.

By the way, you mentioned earlier that you based our species on what matched our soul’s wavelength or whatever, but…I’m a spider, aren’t I?

“You are indeed.”

So my soul was closest to a spider’s?

“Yes, the wavelength matched quite well, it seems. Most of the others were reincarnated as humans, incidentally.”

Say whaaat?!

Why me?!

Why am I a spider?!

I want to be a human, too!

How come I got stuck playing a survival game from birth?!

“Your frustration is understandable, but it’s because you were born as a spider that you were able to get such a big head start. It’s not necessarily a bad thing, don’t you agree?”

Head start?

“Quite. The others are all still babies.”

…Ohhh.

I get it.

I guess it hasn’t been that long since I was born.

“There is that, but it also happens that you were born much faster than a human would be. In terms of the Earth calendar, you were born about six months earlier than they were.”

Huh.

So I got half a year’s head start, and now I’ve been growing like crazy while they’re still in cribs going “goo-goo ga-ga”?

“Yes, indeed. Do you have any other questions?”

Yeah, why did you make such an annoying system in the first place?

Couldn’t you have fixed things without it somehow, being as powerful as you are and all?

“I wasn’t trying to fix anything. I am an evil god, remember?”

Yeah, I suppose.

“Well, I look forward to seeing what exciting actions you’ll take next.”

Or you could stop watching me.

“Oh, but I will watch. With a bag of chips in one hand and a game in the other, most likely.”

Well, doesn’t that sound nice.

What, are you still in Japan?

“Indeed.”

No fair!

“These chips are delicious. Oh, there’s that new ice cream that just came out, too. Maybe I’ll try it later.”

Die!!!

Ice creeeeam…

“I’ve got chocolate and vanilla. Which do you think I should have first?”

Shut up and die!

Don’t talk to me about delicious desserts!

“Perhaps I ought to indulge a little and eat both at once.”

Gaaah!

“Now, that’s enough joking for today. I’m rooting for you to defeat her, you know. I hope you’ll survive and keep entertaining me.”

Sure. I’m not gonna die until I get to slap you in the face and steal your ice cream!

“I can’t wait. Well, good-bye for now.”

The smartphone poofs away.

That so-called evil god just talked at me for a while and left.

With the cell phone gone, I take some time to release the tension from my body.

I put on a show of having a light conversation, but I was actually pretty nervous.

D claims to be an evil god.

And that thing about having a spider self-destruct button might’ve been a joke, but the part about being able to kill me at any time is for real.

That “evil god” could kill me as easily as switching on a TV with the remote.

For some reason, D seems to like me enough to keep me alive for now, but that could change at any time.

It’s just like D said: The fate of the world, the life and death of others, all of that is just entertainment to them.

As is the choice whether or not to kill.

D doesn’t care, as long as it makes for an enjoyable show.

And I don’t think D actually reincarnated us out of a sense of obligation, like they claimed.

Most likely, D did it because it would be more amusing that way.

That’s my guess, at least.

I am grateful that D reincarnated me after I died.

However, that means we reincarnations are nothing more than D’s playthings, no matter what we do.

And that bothers me.

But there’s nothing I can do.

I’m sure that cruel god knows that I feel this way, too.

I bet that jerk gets a kick out of it.

Monster Encyclopedia

file.16 ZANA HOROWA

status

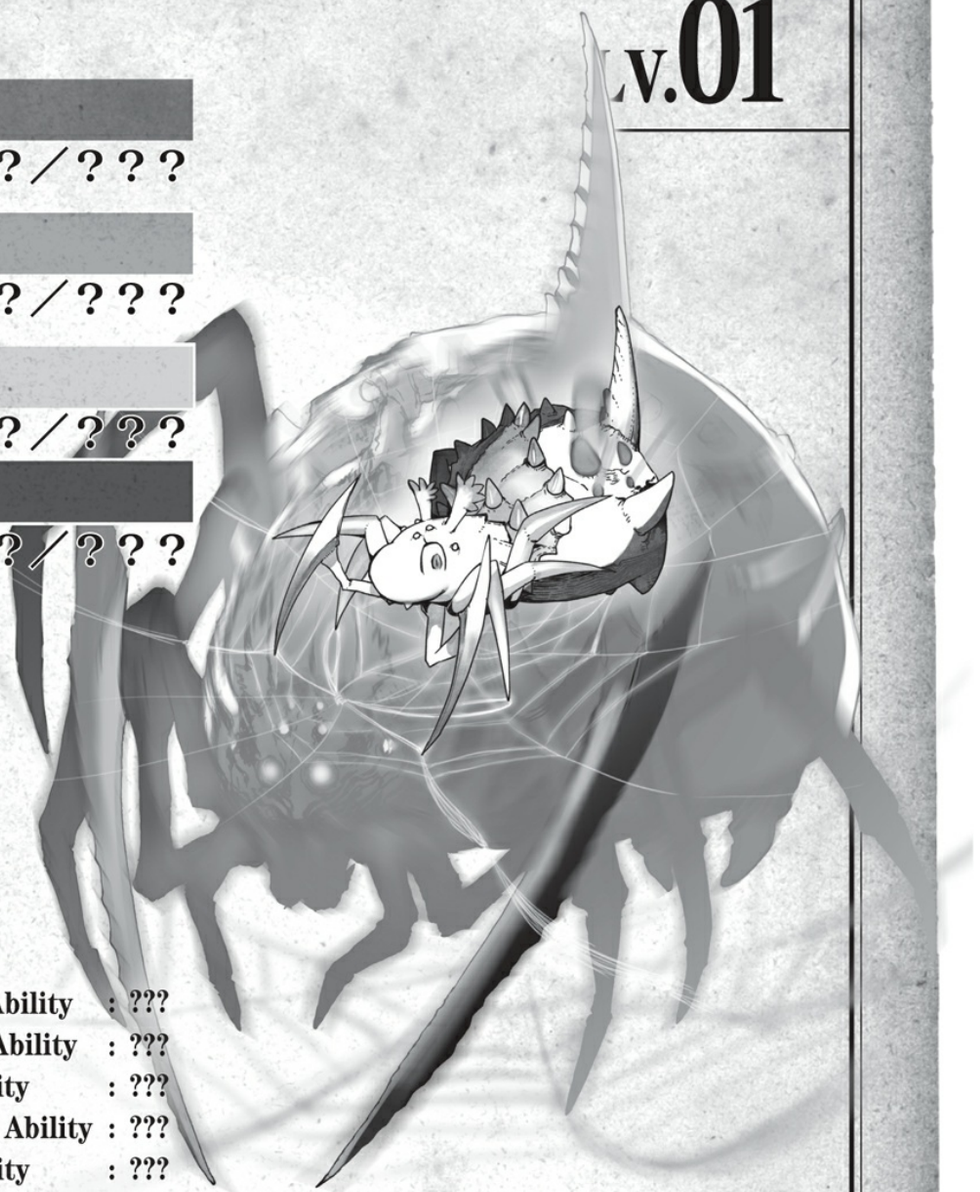
Lv.01

HP ???/???

MP ???/???

SP ???/???

???/???



Average Offensive Ability : ???
Average Defensive Ability : ???
Average Magic Ability : ???
Average Resistance Ability : ???
Average Speed Ability : ???

skill ???

A monster with no confirmed sightings in recorded history. As such, there is little to no information about it, and it is shrouded in mystery. It is said to be an evolution of the Ede Saine, but even that is merely conjecture. The only monster said to have evolved into this species is the one known as the Nightmare of the Labyrinth, which is considered an extremely dangerous legendary-class monster.



Escape from the Great Elroe Labyrinth

I’m walking through the hallway.

I reach my classroom, open the door, and enter.

Most of the students are already inside.

A cluster of boys is laughing together.

In the center of the group is Natsume.

Next to him, Sakurazaki smiles wryly.

I don’t know what they’re talking about, but I’m sure it’s nothing good.

As I head to my seat, I see Hasebe sitting at the desk next to mine, deep in conversation with Temarikawa and Furuta.

I put my bag on my desk and head over to Kanata and Kyouya, who are chatting by the window.

Out of the corner of my eye, I catch sight of Wakaba quietly sitting at her desk.

Shinohara doesn’t seem to be here yet, so no one is teasing her.

Suddenly, I notice a spiderweb on the window opposite the one where Kanata and Kyouya are standing.

For some reason, I can’t tear my eyes away from it.

When I finally do look away, a girl is standing in front of me.

She looks dark and eerie, almost like a ghost.

Yet her eyes alone are glittering brightly.

This is the girl who’s been secretly nicknamed Rihoko.

Her hand reaches toward me…

“Agh?!”

I jump up without thinking.

Looking around, I know that I’m still in the Great Elroe Labyrinth.

That’s right. This isn’t the high school I went to in my old life back in Japan. It’s a labyrinth in another world, one that’s full of monsters.

So what was the dream I just had?

Did it mean something?

Ever since we entered the Great Elroe Labyrinth, I’ve been having strange dreams.

It’s been a long time since I dreamed about my past life.

At this point, I can barely even remember what everyone looked like then.

If I try to picture Natsume, all I can see is Hugo’s face.

Even my memory of my own face is starting to get hazy.

But I can’t forget Rihoko’s face, even if I want to.

I reach for Julius’s white scarf around my neck, trying to calm my mind.

There’s still a little more time left for resting.

I have to go back to sleep to restore my physical strength.

But even knowing that, I still spend the rest of the night wide awake.

After the encounter with the Nightmare’s Vestiges, the journey has gone surprisingly well.

Thanks in large part to the freshly evolved earth dragon devouring all the monsters in the area, we’ve hardly had to fight at all.

Most likely, the presence of the Nightmare’s Vestiges had something to do with the absence of monsters as well.

But we haven’t seen a single trace of a Nightmare’s Vestige since.

And now, at long last, we’ve almost reached the exit of the Great Elroe

Labyrinth.

“A pit?”

I repeat Basgath’s words uncertainly.

“Yep, that’s right.”

Most likely, empire soldiers will be waiting for us at the main exit of the labyrinth.

In order to avoid them, we’re taking a side route to get to a different exit some distance away.

This exit, as it turns out, is a pit.

Basgath explains as we walk.

“There’re a few giant holes in the labyrinth, which we call pits. Rumor has it that if yeh go down into the hole, you’ll reach the Lower Stratum, but hardly anyone’s ever come back. What few survivors there are say there’s an unthinkable amount of monsters down there. And they’re all way stronger than anything here in the Upper Stratum.”

There are still many mysteries surrounding the Great Elroe Labyrinth.

Even Basgath is only familiar with the Upper Stratum.

The Lower Stratum…

I’d definitely rather not experience a danger zone like that.

“Anyway, one of these pits leads to the surface. It’s a hole that was made by a legendary-class monster who could well be called the ruler of this labyrinth: the queen taratect.”

Basgath explains that around the time when we were still babies, the infamous “Nightmare” came out of the labyrinth.

And as if they were acting in concert, the queen taratect destroyed a huge chunk of bedrock to get outside as well.

Then she went on a destructive rampage, demolishing forests and even smashing a mountain.

Fortunately, there were no humans living there, so there were few casualties, but it's said that even to this day, you can clearly see remnants of the destruction.

It's a bit hard to believe, but apparently it's all true.

Imagining that power directed toward a human settlement sends chills down my spine.

I guess it makes sense that even Basgath would be traumatized by his encounter with the Nightmare, since it's categorized on the same level as the queen taratect.

If I ran into a creature like that, I might freeze up completely.

"Thing is, this pit is also home to monsters called finjicotes. They're giant bees, and they've made their nest there. They're not much trouble on their own, but their real strength lies in numbers. And you have to fight 'em while climbing up a vertical wall. It's why it's rarely used as an exit."

That makes sense.

Just like the entrance being in the water dragons' territory, there's got to be a pretty good reason no one uses it.

Still, we've got Fei on our side.

If we ride on her back, we can blast our way through a whole swarm of monsters.

"So we're countin' on you."

"Sure. But first, please face the other way."

Near the entrance to the pit, we turn our backs on Fei and wait.

Behind us is the rustling sound of Fei taking off her clothes.

Since she's returning to her dragon form, if she didn't take her clothes off, they'd get ripped to shreds when she got bigger.

But of course, there are no changing rooms in a labyrinth.

That's why we have to look away while she strips down to transform.

However, no one said we couldn't listen.

Catching on to me somehow, Katia promptly blocks my ears.

I'm a healthy young man, you know. You could at least let me hear it…

But I have a feeling I'd get yelled at for saying that, so I keep it to myself.

"Sorry for the wait."

Fei's voice reaches my mind through Telepathy.

Turning around, we're greeted by Fei in her dragon form.

Right away, we get on her back.

Now that I've seen her in human form, it occurs to me that Fei is a girl. Which means that I'm on a girl's back.

It never bothered me before, but now that I'm aware of it, I can't help feeling awkward.

"Get your mind out of the gutter, will you? Consider our current situation."

Again reading my thoughts, Katia hits the nail on the head.

I mean…she's right, of course.

But I wasn't trying to mess around or anything.

A young man can't help it if certain things preoccupy his mind at times.

"Could you not have a lovers' quarrel on my back, please? I *will* shake you off."

"I'm sorry."

Fei sounds particularly disgusted.

I refocus on the matter at hand and let Fei fly.

As soon as we enter the pit, countless bees fly at us.

They really are giant, too.

But as far as I can tell from Appraisal, their stats aren't all that high.

Fei fends them off easily with just her claws and tail.

The rest of us use magic to shoot down the bees buzzing around us.

They’re certainly not much of a threat.

But the sheer number makes them pretty annoying.

“Oh, enough already!”

Fei seems to feel the same way. With an irritated cry, she opens her mouth wide.

Then a breath attack fires from her mouth.

Reducing all of the bees around us to cinders.

It probably isn’t as powerful as the queen taratect’s attack that broke through the rock ceiling, but by the time the breath is over, the bees’ numbers have very visibly decreased.

“Now let’s get out of here!”

With the bees gone, Fei ascends through the pit.

Before long, the rock surface all around us vanishes, replaced by a big blue sky.

Finally, we’re outside again.

After so many days, the light of the sun is so bright that I have to squint.

We’ve succeeded in getting out of the Great Elroe Labyrinth.



Guerrilla Warfare

I've been in the Middle Stratum for several days now.

Time to solidify my plans.

First off, I'm definitely not gonna be dumb enough to attack Mother head-on.

Even with my evolution and my new Immortality skill, I simply don't think I can beat her.

Her stats are so overwhelmingly better than mine that even a zombie attack wouldn't do much.

In which case, the smart choice would be to wait until my Parallel Minds take care of things.

Besides, I distinctly heard D say this:

"I'm rooting for you to defeat her, you know. I hope you'll survive and keep entertaining me."

Survive.

D knew I'd just acquired the Immortality skill but still used the word "survive."

That means that even with the Immortality skill, it's not impossible to die.

There must be some kind of loophole to kill someone even if they have the Immortality skill.

Otherwise, I don't think D would've phrased it that way.

For one thing, I could still get sealed away forever.

I'd rather not get trapped in concrete for eternity or something like that.

I should probably just think of Immortality as a last resort.

In which case, the next problem I have to deal with is that puppet spider.

But I don't think I can beat that thing in a head-to-head battle, either.

Maybe I could try to take advantage of its weaknesses or something, like I did with Araba, but my odds of winning still wouldn't be very high.

Let's put that off for now.

I'll avoid Mother and the puppet spider and set my sights on the rest of the spider army instead.

Specifically, I'll hide away in the Upper Stratum, wait for my chance, and destroy them one by one.

It's guerrilla warfare!

I guess it's possible that there's more than one of those awful puppet spiders, but as long as I make sure to teleport away the second things get dicey, I'm hoping that I'll manage somehow.

In the end, I'm really just buying time with half-hearted attacks until my Parallel Minds can beat Mother.

I'm counting on you, Parallel Minds.

I'd better flee from the Middle Stratum now that danger is approaching.

Yep. She's still pretty far away, but Mother has entered the Middle Stratum.

That means I can't stay here any longer.

Otherwise, I would've just hidden in the Middle Stratum for as long as it took. But Mother won't let me get away with that.

She's like a devoted mom, really, forcing her shut-in daughter to get out of the house.

All right, all right, Mother.

I'll go out for a little bit.

Now I'm up in the Upper Stratum.

Hey, US. It's been a while.

Is it me, or has this place changed a bit since the last time I was here?

Specifically, the huge number of spider monsters crawling all over the place.

Mother must have laid eggs up here.

She has an Egg-Laying skill, which does exactly what it sounds like it would do.

She can produce children all by herself, with monogenetic reproduction.

I'm sure that's how I was born, too.

Normally, these baby spiders would go around eating one another or getting eaten by other monsters. This time, however, Mother's control has united all of them to chase after me.

She probably doesn't expect them to be able to kill me, but she can use them to figure out where I've appeared.

I might as well take her up on that.

You really think you can catch up with me when I can use Teleport?

Let the spider hunt begin!

I'm not afraid of some puny newborn lesser taratects!

In fact, they'll probably die on their own even if I don't do anything.

They're ridiculously weak, just like I used to be.

Way too weak!

So weak that…I almost feel kinda bad.

I don't know how many of them are born in a single round of egg laying, but how many could possibly survive long enough to evolve? One or two? Maybe even none at all?

That means my odds of survival were probably less than 1 percent, and somehow I still made it.

That said, since I got a reincarnation bonus in the form of the Skanda skill, I don't think it's really the same.

Wow. Thinking about how hard I struggled back then is making me sorta sad. It's enough to make me feel a bit of sympathy for my little brothers and sisters or whatever.

But oh well, that's survival of the fittest for you. Better shake it off and get slaughtering.

Huh? Cruel?

Come on, I don't have any other choice.

As I dispose of the small lesser taratects in huge swaths, some adult taratects hear the commotion and come running.

I finish them off with equal ease.

Sure, an adult taratect gets a big jump in stats, but that's nothing to me now.

Only a greater class or above can compete with me at this point.

Even then, a greater wouldn't beat me unless some kind of miracle occurred.

Sure, I was shocked when I first saw a greater taratect in the Lower Stratum, but now the only thing that's shocking is how much stronger I am than them, if I do say so myself.

Continuing the massacre as I reflect on these thoughts, my Detection warns me of something rapidly approaching.

It's moving at a very high speed and seems to be about the size of a human.

No doubt about it. It's the puppet spider.

The second I sense this, I flee in the opposite direction while whipping up a Teleport rune.

Then I teleport away before it can catch up to me.

The scenery around me warps, and now I'm outside, where Mother almost killed me.

If I just stay in the labyrinth, I'll probably run out of places to hide eventually. I might as well take this chance to expand my range outside a little, which has the added bonus of increasing my number of potential teleport spots.

I wander around outside for a while as I wait for things to cool down in the labyrinth.

Then, after a day or so, I teleport back into the Upper Stratum and get back to

spider hunting.

Rinse and repeat.

After several days of this routine, my spider hunt is coming along nicely. I've bagged one arch and six greaters and racked up countless other, lesser kills in the process.

I'm particularly proud that I was able to beat even one arch.

I might talk big, but archs are still a pretty powerful enemy.

I can manage a single one well enough, but if there're two or more, my chances of winning drop like a stone.

I don't know how many other archs there are altogether, but being able to take even one out of the equation is a pretty big deal.

Also, judging by the way the puppet spider keeps coming after me, I'm pretty sure there's only one.

It seems to be the same individual every time, and I'm sure Mother wouldn't hold back in this situation, so that makes me think that it's probably the only one she has.

Of course, even that could be one of Mother's tricks. It's possible that a second one will appear when I least expect it or something.

If that happens, well, I guess I'll just accept defeat.

I mean, I don't think she'd be able to make a second one appear with such perfect timing, nor do I think a second one exists in the first place.

But even with just the one, all I can do right now is run away from it.

Sure, my levels have gone up a few times during my spider hunt, but that's not enough to close the huge gap between our stats.

Maybe if I beat Mother, it'll give up on trying to chase me around, but I probably shouldn't bank on that.

If anything, it might get extra vengeful if I beat her, and it'd come after me twice as hard.

If that happens, I'll have to deal with it somehow, but nothing comes to mind

at the moment.

For the time being, I guess I just have to keep avoiding Mother and the puppet spider and keep reducing the rest of her ranks.

So that's the latest in the labyrinth. Meanwhile, outside, I've arrived at the ocean.

I'm traveling next to it right now, though I've yet to come across any human villages or anything.

I'm guessing I'll find some kind of port or fishing village eventually if I keep traveling along the beach, but I'm not sure what to do if that happens.

I guess I'll probably just avoid it and keep moving.

Also, I still can't get in contact with my Parallel Minds.

But I can still feel the connection, so I don't think they've been done in or anything.

I just have to believe that they're hard at work over there.

If they can defeat Mother, my situation will improve considerably.

Until then, I just have to keep whittling away at her forces and make sure I don't get killed.

If I keep buying time like this, I'm sure I'll beat Mother eventually.

For now, everything's going according to plan.

Yep, things are looking up.

Even if worse comes to worst, I still have my insurance in the form of Immortality.

I was careless.

At the time, I thought I was staying on guard, but now I think I should've been more vigilant.

Back then, I had no idea.

When D mentioned defeating "her," I just assumed that was referring to Mother.

I never even imagined that it was someone else entirely, and that she was already hot on my trail.



THE DARK SECRETS OF THE OTHER WORLD

“Thank you for everything.”

We bow our heads to Basgath.

After leaving the Great Elroe Labyrinth, we stayed overnight at Basgath’s base.

And now, early in the morning, we’re leaving for the elf village.

This is where we part ways with Basgath.

“Don’t mention it.”

Basgath nods.

“Are yeh sure I can take all the earth dragon parts, though? They’ll sell for a fortune, y’know.”

“Of course. We can’t afford to bring anything that would slow us down anyway. Think of it as our thanks for all your help.”

“Well, all right, then,” the guide says with a grin.

“Mr. Basgath. Would you perhaps—?”

“I’m just a simple guide, boy.” Basgath responds before I can even finish speaking.

He seems to know what I was about to say.

Basgath is a seasoned warrior.

That became very clear in our time in the Great Elroe Labyrinth.

Moreover, he has incredibly good judgment thanks to his abundance of experience.

To be honest, I wanted him to come with us.

But Basgath promptly declined.

“A guide’s job is just that—to guide people. Besides, I’ve already retired. There’s no need for an old man like me to stick my nose where it don’t belong anymore.”

He chuckles a little.

But then his face grows serious again.

“Boy. This is just a gut feelin’, but I think something big’s gonna happen soon. I got no proof, o’course. But that fear’s been hangin’ over me for the past few years now. This mess yer caught up in now might be a harbinger of things to come.”

That makes sense.

It’s not just what’s happening with Hugo.

The massive war with the demons.

The Hero title being passed on to someone new.

There’s been a lot going on with the world lately.

“I just hope that guidin’ yeh all here has made the world even a little bit better. Then I’ll feel like I’ve done my part and then some.”

Basgath holds out his hand.

“We’ll do our very best to make sure that happens.”

I grasp his hand tightly for a firm handshake.

“My job is just navigatin’ the labyrinth. But I think yer job is much bigger, boy. Good luck.”

These words encourage me a great deal.

After parting ways with Basgath, we continue on our journey to the elf village.

Riding on Fei’s back, it’ll take about two days.

We’ve arrived at a town on the edge of a region called Sariella.

Before we enter, Fei turns back into human form and dons a loose cloak to cover her wings.

This is on top of wrapping them around her body, too.

Otherwise, her wings would draw attention.

This might be a fantasy world, but there aren't any races like beastfolk or anything.

Which means there's no humanoid species that has wings.

I've imagined that if anyone were to catch sight of her wings under her cloak, they'd probably be either curious or suspicious.

But apparently, the situation is more serious than I thought.

"The people of Sariella all worship the Goddess. And in the legends, the Goddess has white wings. Who knows what they would do if they saw Fei's wings?"

Ahh.

According to Ms. Oka, in the worst-case scenario, they might even attack her for falsely impersonating the Goddess.

It's more likely that they would do the opposite—namely, try to worship her—but our teacher doesn't want to take any chances.

Since people in this region fervently believe in the Goddess, they have a unique way of thinking.

Because of that, their relationship with the Followers of the Word of God is rocky, to the point where they've waged war on one another in the past.

I myself don't subscribe to the Word of God religion, but they've been in charge of the hero for generations.

If they found out that I'm the new hero, I might get dragged into unnecessary conflict.

So it's best if we avoid standing out as much as possible.

I hate to put Fei through that kind of discomfort, but it's our only option while we're in this region.

Because knowing what I know, I can't help but feel that all of this world's religions are extremely shady.

"This world was essentially created as part of a game among gods."

This was the day before we left for the elf village.

With that introduction, Ms. Oka launched into an explanation.

"First of all, since we're bringing Hyrince and Anna to the elf village, I would like to tell them about our true nature. Is that all right with you, Shun and Katia?"

What she meant was that she was planning to tell them that we're all reincarnations.

I nodded right away, but Katia seemed less convinced.

"May I ask whether that is connected to the elf village?"

"Yes. I'll do my best to explain why."

Ms. Oka nodded firmly.

After thinking for a moment, Katia nodded as well.

"Shun, Katia, Fei, and I are all reincarnations. We were born with memories of our lives in another world."

At first, Hyrince and Anna just looked confused.

Fortunately, though, the concept of reincarnation does exist in this world, so they accepted it with more explanation.

"I guess that does explain a few things," Hyrince said at last.

"But…Ms. Oka, was it? What does that have to do with what we were discussing before?"

"It's related to the elves' predictions and my desires," Ms. Oka responded.

"First, as I've already told Shun, the elves have been looking after the reincarnations for some time. The reason is a combination of what the elves have predicted and what I implored them to do. Naturally, my desire is to make sure all the reincarnations are safe. As you all know, this world is very

dangerous, full of monsters and even hostile demons. The world we came from was peaceful, so none of us are accustomed to fighting. That's what makes it so difficult for reincarnations to get by in this world. I've been protecting them by taking them to live in safety in the elf village."

That couldn't have been as easy as she made it sound.

Searching the world for reincarnations, without a single clue to go on.

And as she said herself, this world is a dangerous one.

When I was still just a child, Ms. Oka was bustling all over the world, gathering the reincarnations.

I was sure that journey was harder than I could imagine.

If anything, our teacher's excellent magical ability is proof of that.

"However, the elves' plan was slightly different. They want to make sure that certain powerful beings cannot use the reincarnations for their own ends. These beings are called administrators, but you could also call them gods."

That put things on a much larger scale all of a sudden, but I guessed that it had to do with her statement about this world being a "game among gods."

"This may seem sudden, but let me ask you all a question. What do you think 'status' is?"

"It represents our strength, right?"

"That's correct. But why do you think such a thing exists?"

"Well, because the Word of God made it that way."

Hyrince answered Ms. Oka's questions naturally.

But Katia and I realized the meaning behind her words.

People who were born in this world would probably never question it.

Not status, or the "Word of God," or any of it.

It's just something that's existed for them since the moment they were born.

But we reincarnations know of a world where this "status" doesn't exist.

To us, having stats and such does seem strange.

“That’s right. ‘Status’ was indeed created by a god. Now, do you know why that god created it?”

For that, Hyrince didn’t have an answer.

“In the world we came from, we didn’t hear any ‘Word of God.’ There were no levels, stats, or skills, either. If you worked hard, you could certainly increase your abilities, but not in any form that was visible as a numeric value. For us reincarnations, having levels, stats, skills, and so on is very unusual indeed.”

Hyrince seemed surprised at Ms. Oka’s words.

He’d always taken their existence for granted, so it never seemed “unusual” to him.

“By all rights, levels, skills, and stats are not necessary for a world to exist. The world we came from functioned perfectly without them, so it’s plain to see that much.”

Right. On Earth, we lived without those things just fine.

I was starting to get a faint inkling of why Ms. Oka brought up this subject.

Basically, these “administrators” created levels, stats, skills, and the like for a particular purpose.

That was probably what she was getting at.

“Ms. Oka, what was the gods’ goal in creating all this? To get people to fight?”

Clearly, Katia had come to a similar conclusion.

In fact, she’d gotten a step further than I had.

To make people fight…

That hadn’t occurred to me.

But now that she mentioned it, I realized that all the skills in this world were battle related.

As if to encourage people to fight.

“That’s right. In this world, the more you fight, the more your levels, stats, and skills improve. And if you lose a fight, you die. The more battles there are,

the more deaths there are.”

That made sense.

Lots of battles meant lots of casualties.

But I couldn’t figure out why she was explaining something so obvious.

“And when a living thing dies, the power it’s built up until then is collected… by the administrators.”

Now that information was shocking.

Rationally, from what she’d said so far, it made sense that this would be the reason the administrators created levels, stats, and so on.

However, the whole thing was so absurd that I could scarcely believe it.

“The administrators force people to fight in order to gain more power for themselves. That is why humans and demons are pitted against each other. And why they have designated representatives in the form of the hero and the Demon Lord. To be honest, when I heard that Shun had become the hero, my vision went dark.”

When she turned the subject toward me, I could hear my heart pounding in my ears.

The hero was a representative of humans, chosen by the administrators?

And a part of their plan to force humans and demons to fight?

“Ms. Oka, how credible is all this information?”

It made sense that Katia would ask that question.

Her story was consistent, but given its almost fairy-tale-like nature, it was possible that it was exaggerated or even made up entirely.

“It has been passed down among the elves since ancient times.”

“Does that mean it’s true, though?”

I couldn’t blame Katia for sounding increasingly alarmed and annoyed, either.

Just because the elves had believed it for a long time didn’t necessarily mean that it was true.

“Frankly, I don’t know for sure whether all of this is true, either. However, I can confirm that the beings called ‘administrators’ are real. I’ve seen one of their subordinates with my own eyes. Besides, the elves believe this quite seriously, to the extent that they’ll endanger themselves to secure the reincarnations.”

If Ms. Oka saw one of the administrators’ subordinates, then I was sure administrators actually existed.

But what did this story have to do with the elves’ desire to secure the reincarnations?

Before I could ask, Ms. Oka was already explaining.

“We reincarnations have powerful skills and a large amount of skill points from birth. If used well, they can become very strong indeed. Like us, for example.”

Ms. Oka looked pointedly at Katia and me.

Katia, Fei—who wasn’t with us at the time—and I have certainly all had skills and excess skill points since we were born.

We’re living proof that these advantages can help us get stronger much more quickly than the people around us.

“And when one of us dies, the administrators steal all that power. The elves fear that, so they do not want the reincarnations to gain so much power. So we’ve been gathering the reincarnations and keeping them isolated so that they don’t train up their skills and stats.”

Why were the elves so desperate to keep the administrators from gaining power?

Desperate enough to gather reincarnations from all over the world…

“In that case, wouldn’t it be better to dispose of the lot of us before we get too powerful?”

Katia’s question made my breath catch in my throat.

It wouldn’t be too surprising for things to take that turn, from what we’d heard before. In fact, it would seem only natural.

From what our teacher had explained so far, the elves considered these “administrators” enemies.

If they were that concerned about reincarnations getting too powerful, simply getting rid of them before they got the chance would be much easier than quarantining and monitoring them.

But until Katia spoke up, that possibility hadn’t even occurred to me.

“Not to worry. Potimas, the elves’ chief, had the final say that the reincarnations should be kept alive. Although even I don’t know why he decided that.”

Sophia killed Potimas when we fled the capital.

He’d been staying in the kingdom as a friendship ambassador of the elves for a while, but I’d never heard until then that he was also their chief.

From what Ms. Oka said, I guessed that meant he had a lot of power.

He chose to keep the reincarnations alive, but since he was now dead, we’d never know his motives.

“I’m sure that Potimas had some plans of his own. He was a very analytical person, so I doubt he would have chosen to spare the reincarnations’ lives out of sheer kindness.”

It sounded like Ms. Oka must have known Potimas pretty well.

That would make sense. He was her father.

“Shun, please don’t make that face. Yes, Potimas was my father, but we hardly had a familial relationship. He and I were simply using each other and nothing more. So though it may sound heartless, I’m not too broken up about his death.”

I wondered what kind of face I was making.

Despite her tight smile, Ms. Oka looked upset to me.

“To return to the matter at hand, the elves’ aim is to overthrow the administrators. To that end, they intended to stop the war between humans and demons, then mediate a better relationship between the two races.

Without war, people won't fight, and they won't need to raise their skills and stats. Which means that the power the administrators gain would also be weakened. That may sound like a drawn-out plan to humans, but since elves live much longer, they have the time and patience to carry it out. In fact, I'm told that they were able to stop the battle between the previous hero and Demon Lord in that way."

But the story doesn't end there.

"Eventually, however, both of them disappeared. The elves suspect it was the work of the administrators. And now, the current Demon Lord seems to be working with them. Otherwise, there would be no reason to instigate such a large-scale war."

I'll never forget Hyrince's expression in that moment.

It was part anger, part suffering, part something that I couldn't quite place.

Hyrince fought in that very war.

And all his comrades, including Julius, were slain before his eyes.

Learning that it was simply for some "administrators" to gain more power must have been hard to swallow.

Even I couldn't accept that my brother was killed for such a futile reason.

I don't want to believe that Ms. Oka's story is true.

I mean, how could it be?

My older brother wished for world peace more than anyone.

But if what Ms. Oka says is true, then his role as the hero was to lead humanity into war.

He only took up his sword to put an end to the fighting.

But according to Ms. Oka, he did the exact opposite.

He was playing right into the hands of the administrators by taking part in the war.

I won't forgive them.

I can’t.

They might as well exist just to trample on my brother’s beliefs.

If all this is true, then I can’t just let the administrators get away with it.

I’m sure Hyrince feels the exact same way.

That would explain his dark expression.

“When I wasn’t at the academy, I was away helping the elves try to avert the war. No matter what their reasons, I still owe them a great debt for protecting the reincarnations. But all those efforts were in vain, for the war has already started.”

“So that’s why you were gone so often…”

Ms. Oka rarely showed up in class at the academy.

And now we know why.

She wouldn’t tell us specifically what she was doing, but knowing her, it was because she didn’t want us to know what she’d been through.

“I believe that the administrators figured out what the elves were doing. They disposed of the demon that was secretly working with the elves. And most likely, their goal in recent events was to take out Potimas, as well as the humans who were allied with the elves, like Shun’s father and Leston.”

“Wait a minute! Wasn’t Hugo responsible for all that?!”

Ms. Oka’s phrasing seemed to indicate that the administrators were behind everything that happened recently.

Clearly, that was no mistake.

“This doesn’t change what Hugo did, but I think he’s most likely being used. The fact that Sophia was with him is proof of that.”

Sophia. The girl who outmatched us so easily.

Ms. Oka took a deep breath and revealed the truth:

“Her name is Sophia Keren. And in her previous life, she was Shouko Negishi. She is one of the reincarnations who has sided with the administrators.”

FILIM0S HARRIFENAS

The daughter of the elf chief, Potimas Harrifenas. A reincarnation who retains her memories of being Kanami Okazaki, a teacher in Japan. In that life, she was a classical literature teacher whose students affectionately nicknamed her Ms. Oka. Since being reincarnated, she has worked from a young age to ensure the safety of her former students, succeeding in bringing most of them to the elf village. However, there are many mysteries behind her actions, and Katia suspects her of hiding things. Even in this life, her students still tend to call her Ms. Oka.



So I'm a Spider, So What?
Character Collection



GOD'S HUNTING DOG

A beautiful young woman gazes at the ever-changing landscape outside the carriage with an expression steeped in melancholy.

Sitting directly across from me, Sophia Keren is so beautiful that even a fellow woman like me could be tempted to stare.

Although she's still fairly young, something about her alluring visage makes her seem more mature.

She's literally a femme fatale, and she looks the part, too.

It's hard to believe that we're the same age.

However, what most people don't know is that she can actually be very childish.

Her personality is incredibly selfish, to the point where everything she does is solely for her own amusement.

Perhaps she inherited this trait from Master.

Even now, though she looks dramatic as she stares longingly out the window, I'm sure all she's thinking about is how bored she is.

Sophia is selfish and freewheeling and never thinks things through.

However, she also happens to be incredibly powerful.

In a word, I think she can only be described as a menace.

As if reading my thoughts, Sophia turns to look at me.

"What is it?" I ask evenly.

"I'm bored."

I guess she wasn’t reading my thoughts, then.

Still, what does she expect me to do about her boredom?

“Just be patient, please.”

“Ugh. If I knew it was going to take this long, I could’ve just run there myself.”

“Feel free to do so now, if you wish.”

Her face twists into an obvious grimace at my curt remark.

So childish.

The idea that running would be faster than the carriage is childish in itself, too. Unbelievable.

Currently, we are traveling with the advance guard of Prince Hugo’s imperial army.

Though we are essentially honored guests, we are still commanders, progressing along with the troops.

Why in the world would she suggest that running would be faster? We must keep pace with the rest of the army.

Yes, I’m sure she could move faster on her own.

But even if she got there early, she would just be stuck waiting for the rest of the army to catch up, so she would still be bored.

Does she not even realize that?

“Hmm. You really hate me, don’t you?”

“Of course I do.”

Why ask such an obvious question?

Her face grows only more sullen at my response.

The fact that her childish personality prevents her from recognizing the position I’m in only frustrates me more.

Though I suppose I could still be doing a better job of controlling my emotions myself.

I do my best to keep things from showing on my face, but I can't quite keep my bitter thoughts in check.

I must be diligent.

Perhaps that's the reason Master put me in charge of supervising her?

No, I doubt even our master would make a major decision like this for such a trivial reason.

"Please make an effort to be more serious. This is not a game, you realize."

"I knooow. But when I'm bored, I'm bored."

So she doesn't actually realize that, then.

"Well, you must keep such complaints to yourself. How do you think the brave soldiers marching outside feel?"



While we get to ride in a carriage, the soldiers traveling with us are on foot.

Some are riding on beast mounts, but most are foot soldiers, wearing heavy armor and carrying their weapons as they walk.

If they were to hear such a petty complaint from someone with the privilege of riding in a carriage, surely that would only foster resentment.

“Besides, Sir Wald is hard at work even as we speak. We cannot waste time trifling.”

Our comrade and mutual friend Sir Wald is stationed at Prince Hugo’s side.

His role is to keep watch on the prince in case he attempts anything that runs contrary to our plans.

“Oh, he’s just trying to make up for his little blunder however he can, that’s all. It’s cute how hard he’s trying, don’t you think?”

“Please don’t ever say that to his face.”

Wald is deeply concerned about that situation.

The “blunder” in question is that he was burned by the wyrm’s breath when the hero and his allies got away.

Of course, we intended to let them go from the start, so that isn’t a problem. However, since he was the only one of us to be wounded, he seems to have taken the incident as a personal failure.

All the more since it happened in front of the person he’s in love with, no doubt.

Personally, the way he scrambles like a faithful dog to do anything that might improve his value in her eyes, no matter how troublesome the task, only makes me think less of him.

And judging by her remark just now, it doesn’t seem like her opinion of him has gone up or down at all.

Does she even see him as a potential romantic interest?

Since I have no romantic experience myself, I can’t say either way.

“But that wyrm is a reincarnation, too. There’s no shame in losing that fight, if you ask me.”

The white wyrm that interrupted our battle with the hero and his compatriots.

According to Master, that creature is a reincarnation, too.

Sophia affirmed this when we saw it in person, so there is no doubt in my mind.

“Still, it must have been frustrating for him. And surely he didn’t want to look incompetent in front of the object of his affection, so try to be more considerate. Besides, you wouldn’t like to lose to a reincarnation yourself, would you?”

Certainly, reincarnations have the potential to become very powerful.

The proof of that is sitting right in front of me.

Sophia is a reincarnation, too, after all.

However, one cannot simply use that as an excuse for losing.

“Yeah, I guess not.”

Sophia herself hates to lose, so she makes no attempt to deny my point.

“D’you think you could’ve won if you fought the hero then and there?” she asks suddenly.

It’s a somewhat abrupt shift in subject, though not entirely unexpected.

However, I would have preferred to avoid it.

“I suppose I likely would have lost. All I did was slow him down from a distance. If we were to fight in a one-on-one battle, my odds of winning would be slim.”

When we fought the hero, I threw my chakram at him from a distance.

At the time, he was carrying an unconscious woman in one arm and was surrounded by soldiers, yet he still managed to ward off my attacks.

I wasn’t seriously attempting to kill him, of course, but I still must commend

his ability to hold his own in that situation.

If I had to fight him head-on, without any such conditions, I can only assume that the odds would be against me.

Although I wouldn't go so far as to say I wouldn't stand a chance.

"Huh. So you admit you would lose?"

Sophia smiles nastily.

This is why I despise her.

"One must always be accurate in analyzing an opponent's strength. It would be unwise to underestimate their strength or overestimate one's own."

"Doesn't it bother you, though?"

"Is that so wrong?"

Yes, I'll admit it.

It does bother me that the hero is stronger than I am.

However, the fact that this woman has to point it out is far more vexing.

"No, I didn't say that. I mean, no one likes to lose, really."

Her glossy lips curve into a smile as she continues.

"I just wanted to see that annoyed look on your face."

"You hate me right back, don't you?"

"Of course."

Truly, what a frustrating person she is.



7 Demon Lord Attack

The waves rock me gently as I float.

Scorching sun.

Blue sea.

It’s enough to make anyone want to swim, so I figured I’d give it a try.

Unfortunately, as it turns out, my spider body is structured in a way that it can only float on top of the water.

So since I can’t swim properly, I’m just floating on the surface.

Not exactly sure what I was expecting.

I mean, I might as well be sitting on a pool float.

If I really try, I can dive a little bit.

But as soon as I lose focus for a second, I pop right back up to the surface.

You can’t really call that swimming.

But in my old life, my incredible form in the water would’ve put mermaids to shame!

…Sorry, that was a blatant lie.

I could barely even pull off a dead man’s float.

Don’t underestimate my laziness!

I don’t even remember swimming properly in a pool, never mind the ocean!

Blue sky, blue sea.

And now my heart is blue, too.

No waaay.

On top of that, as I'm floating on the water, something attacks me.

It's a water wyrm, which looks sort of like a huge shark.

I beat it at its own game, of course, so now the area around me is an ocean of blood.

And that blood must have attracted other sharks, because now there are a bunch of fins circling around me in the water.

Ugh, what a pain. I blow them all up with magic, making the ocean of blood even bigger.

Man, what am I doing?

I came here to relax a little, to take my mind off the brutal attacks I've been launching on the spider army.

But now I'm just massacring water wyrms instead.

Am I bloodthirsty or what?

I mean, Spider vs Shark sounds like a B movie at best.

How did taking a nice beach break turn into another emotionally exhausting waste of time?

No, I guess I can't say that. The sharks were pretty strong, so I got a delicious amount of EXP.

I even went up a level.

Still, at this point, going up a single level doesn't mean much.

I can't even come close to the puppet spider, never mind Mother.

In terms of magic alone, I could probably go head-to-head with the puppet spider, but in every other stat, it's way stronger than I am.

The gap in our physical stats is particularly devastating, aside from maybe speed.

What should I do?

〖Finally, a signal!〗

Wha—?!

Geez, that scared me!

《Sorry to interrupt, real me, but you've gotta run for it!》

Huh?

It's been a long time since I've heard from Parallel Mind former magic brain number one. And now it's suddenly telling me to run?

I look around, but I don't see Mother anywhere.

No sign of the puppet spider, either. In fact, I don't see any monsters at all.

Do I really have to run? I'm not sensing any danger.

《No time to explain! Okay, maybe just a little. Basically, the worst monstrosity ever is heading toward you right now!》

Huh?! Mother?!

《No! We got it all wrong. We thought Mother was the strongest, but she's not. There's something even worse than her!》

Wait, what?

I don't get it.

Something even stronger than Mother?

How could that possibly exist?

《It does. And it's heading your way right now!》

It's hard to believe this out of nowhere, but if I can communicate with my Parallel Minds again, that must mean Mother restored the link between us to figure out where I am.

She must have done that for a reason.

Besides, I'm the one giving myself this information.

If I can't believe myself, who can I believe?

In any case, I'd better run for now.

But my decision comes too late.

Or perhaps it was impossible to run from the very beginning.

“****!”

An explosion.

And a voice that somehow comes through the noise clearly.

As everything erupts into chaos, the calm part of my mind tries to analyze what happened.

Something just appeared here.

It didn’t even teleport. It was just that fast.

The explosive sound was the impact of its arrival.

There was nothing in my range of vision just seconds ago, and now something arrived from outside that range so quickly that it caused a powerful shock wave.

Unbelievable speed.

It appeared right in front of my eyes, so fast that it could easily have leaped straight from the pages of a battle manga.

Yes, right in front of me.

The powerful shock has damaged my body significantly, as if a meteor had landed right next to me.

But the enemy who just appeared is so far out of the ordinary that I have no choice but to ignore that damage.

<Appraisal Blocked>

That’s what happens at first.

However, I try it again, this time adding the power of Wisdom to my Appraisal.

After a bit of resistance, I can feel it break through, and my Appraisal succeeds.

<Origin taratect LV 139 Name: Ariel

Status: HP: 90,098/90,098 MP: 87,655/87,655 (blue)

(green)

+99,999 (details)

SP: 89,862/89,862 (yellow) (details)

Average Offensive Ability: 90,021 (details)

Average Magical Ability: 87,504 (details)

Average Speed Ability: 89,518 (details)

+99,999 (details)

: 89,856/89,856 (red)

+99,567 (details)

Average Defensive Ability: 89,997 (details)

Average Resistance Ability: 87,489 (details)

Skills:

[HP Ultra-Fast Recovery LV 4]	[MP Rapid Recovery LV 10]	[MP Lessened Consumption LV 10]	[Precise Magic Power Operation LV 10]
[Magic Divinity LV 10]	[Magic Power Conferment LV 10]	[Magic Conferment LV 10]	[Magic Power Super-Attack LV 10]
[SP Rapid Recovery LV 10]	[SP Minimized Consumption LV 10]	[Destruction Super-Enhancement LV 10]	[Impact Super-Enhancement LV 10]
[Cutting Super-Enhancement LV 8]	[Piercing Super-Enhancement LV 10]	[Shock Super-Enhancement LV 10]	[Status Condition Super-Enhancement LV 10]
[Battle Divinity LV 10]	[Energy Conferment LV 10]	[Ability Conferment LV 10]	[Energy Super-Attack LV 10]
[Divine Dragon Power LV 10]	[Divine Dragon Barrier LV 10]	[Deadly Poison Attack LV 10]	[Enhanced Paralysis Attack LV 10]
[Poison Synthesis LV 10]	[Medicine Synthesis LV 10]	[Thread Genius LV 10]	[Divine Thread Weaving]
[Thread Control LV 10]	[Psychokinesis LV 10]	[Throw LV 10]	[Expel LV 10]

[Dimensional Maneuvering LV 10]	[Cooperation LV 10]	[Tactician LV 10]	[Fartalk LV 10]
[Kin Control LV 10]	[Egg-Laying LV 10]	[Summoning LV 10]	[Concentration LV 10]
[Thought Super-Acceleration LV 6]	[Future Sight LV 6]	[Parallel Minds LV 4]	[High-Speed Processing LV 10]
[Hit LV 10]	[Evasion LV 10]	[Probability Super-Correction LV 10]	[Stealth LV 10]
[Concealment LV 10]	[Silence LV 10]	[Odorless LV 10]	[Emperor]
[Appraisal LV 10]	[Detection LV 10]	[Sublimation]	[Heretic Magic LV 10]
[Fire Magic LV 8]	[Water Magic LV 10]	[Flood Magic LV 5]	[Wind Magic LV 10]
[Gale Magic LV 10]	[Tempest Magic LV 10]	[Earth Magic LV 10]	[Terrain Magic LV 10]
[Seismic Magic LV 10]	[Lightning Magic LV 10]	[Bolt Magic LV 8]	[Light Magic LV 10]
[Holy Light Magic LV 2]	[Shadow Magic LV 10]	[Dark Magic LV 10]	[Black Magic LV 10]
[Poison Magic LV 10]	[Healing Magic LV 10]	[Spatial Magic LV 2]	[Heavy Magic LV 10]
[Abyss Magic LV 10]	[Great Demon Lord LV 10]	[Dignity LV 5]	[Rage LV 9]
[Gluttony]	[Usurp LV 8]	[Rest LV 9]	[Depraved LV 4]
[Physical Nullification]	[Flame Resistance LV 5]	[Flood Nullification]	[Gale Nullification]
[Terrain Nullification]	[Bolt Nullification]	[Holy Light Resistance LV 8]	[Black Nullification]
[Heavy Nullification]	[Status Condition Nullification]	[Acid Nullification]	[Rot Super-Resistance LV 7]

[Faint Nullification]	[Fear Nullification]	[Heresy Super-Resistance LV 6]	[Pain Nullification]
[Suffering Nullification]	[Night Vision LV 10]	[Clairvoyance LV 10]	[Five Senses Super-Enhancement LV 10]
[Perception Expansion LV 10]	[Divinity Expansion LV 3]	[Ultimate Life LV 10]	[Ultimate Magic LV 10]
[Ultimate Movement LV 10]	[Fortune LV 10]	[Fortitude LV 10]	[Stronghold LV 10]
[Deva LV 10]	[Sanctum LV 10]	[Skanda LV 10]	[Taboo LV 10]

Skill Points: 0

Titles:

[Human Slayer]	[Human Slaughterer]	[Human Calamity]	[Demon Slayer]
[Demon Slaughterer]	[Demon Calamity]	[Fairy Slayer]	[Fairy Slaughterer]
[Fairy Calamity]	[Monster Slayer]	[Monster Slaughterer]	[Monster Calamity]
[Wyrm Slayer]	[Wyrm Slaughterer]	[Wyrm Calamity]	[Dragon Slayer]
[Dragon Slaughterer]	[Merciless]	[Foul Feeder]	[Kin Eater]
[Assassin]	[Poison Technique User]	[Thread User]	[Puppet User]
[Commander]	[Champion]	[Lord]	[Ancient Divine Beast]
[Ruler of Gluttony]	[Demon Lord]		

>

I'll be honest. I would have been better off not knowing.

This being with the Demon Lord title.

The girl who appeared before me was a demon lord and the strongest spider of all.

“******, *******!”

This monstrosity in the shape of a young girl speaks to me rather affably.

But of course, I don’t know the language of this world.

So I have no idea what the Demon Lord is saying.

“**********, **********?”

She’s asking me something.

I can tell that much by her tone, but I don’t understand the question itself.

Anyway, I have to show some kind of reaction, if only to buy time.

I tilt my head, point at my mouth, then wave cautiously.

Hopefully, this will convey that I can’t understand what she’s saying.

It doesn’t look like she’s going to attack me right away.

The fact that she’s trying to communicate is proof of that. Or so I thought.

“***. **********.”

But apparently she didn’t like my reaction.

The Demon Lord’s stance changes very plainly.

From that of someone chatting to that of someone ready to attack.

Teleport? I won’t make it in time.

If I could’ve bought a little more time with conversation, it might’ve been a different story, but now I’m going to be killed before I can complete the rune.

There’s no point even trying to fight back.

Her stats overshadow even Mother’s.

And almost all of her crazy-long list of skills is maxed out.

Not to mention that resistance.

How could I possibly win when most attacks won’t even work?

I don’t stand a chance.

“***, **********, ****.”

The Demon Lord waves an arm.

That’s it. Just like that, my body is smashed into splinters.

《The main body went down.》

At my words, the other Parallel Minds fly into a panic.

《Don’t worry. I don’t know what kind of trick she used, but since we haven’t disappeared, that means she’s not dead yet… I think.》

To be honest, I don’t really know myself why we haven’t disappeared.

That’s why I had no choice but to be so vague.

It’s not entirely impossible that the main body really is dead, and we just happened to stay alive because we’re half cut off from it.

Does that mean we’re just souls without a body now?

In that case, we could disappear at any moment.

We have no way of knowing how the system will respond to such an unusual situation, but I doubt that ghosts exist in this world.

What should we do?

This all started right after we lost contact with the main body.

We were concerned about what was going on with our body, but aside from occasionally checking on the status of our connection, all we could do was keep waging our spiritual battle against Mother.

The battle was going pretty well.

Things were starting to turn in our favor, and though it may have just been my imagination, I got the sense that we were getting stronger as we consumed Mother’s spiritual body.

That hypothesis was probably correct.

Mother’s spirit body is essentially her soul.

And it would be no exaggeration to say that the power of stats, skills, and so on in this world is actually the power of the soul.

By eating her soul, not only did we reduce her power, we also absorbed it for ourselves.

Thanks to that, the more time passed, the more we started to gain the upper hand.

But of course, Mother wasn't just going to take that lying down.

I was the first one to sense it.

Mother was making contact with something.

Just like our contact with the main body, she was using a skill's connection to communicate with someone.

I didn't know who it was.

But as soon as I noticed it, I felt an indescribable uneasiness.

And soon, my fears were realized.

I looked through Mother's eyes and saw that girl.

The second I laid eyes on her, even without Appraisal, I could tell for certain that she was a truly monstrous foe.

Or maybe that conviction came from memories in the portion of Mother's soul that I'd eaten.

Either way, I knew this girl was more powerful even than Mother.

Then, Mother restored the connection with our main body to figure out where it was.

And now, we're back to the present.

I think I had the right idea warning the main body.

However, our opponent was just too far out of the norm.

How could I have guessed that she could imitate Teleport just by running?

I knew she was beastly, but this went far beyond my wildest imagination.

I couldn’t even run away from that thing, never mind fight it.

You could say it was inevitable for my main body to be destroyed.

In that moment, I was prepared for death.

But for some reason, we’re not dead yet.

I don’t know whether our body is alive or not, but I have no choice but to hope that it is.

And if our body is still alive, then our job here hasn’t changed.

Actually, it’s just gotten more urgent.

〖Listen up, everyone.〗

I gather the other Parallel Minds to tell them my plan.

〖We’re going to beat Mother. And then we’re going to beat her ruler.〗

All we can do is keep up our spiritual attack.

Since we’re soul fragments, we’re protected by Heresy Nullification, which cancels out any attacks that directly affect the soul.

Thus, we should be able to beat a far more powerful spiritual opponent.

Even if that opponent is heads and shoulders above us.

Or heads and spiders, I guess.

〖We don’t know when our main body will recover or if it’ll even recover at all. But that’s why we have to do whatever we can!〗

Not one of the other Parallel Minds objects to my proposal.



REINCARNATIONS

“Sacrifice your skills! This is the path to salvation!”

As we head into town to buy food and supplies, a voice calls out to us.

“The people of Sariella worship the administrator Sariel as their god. It would be best to avoid engaging with them unless absolutely necessary.”

I agree with Ms. Oka’s whispered advice.

The shouting man doesn’t seem sane.

If this is the work of a so-called administrator, it’s not exactly pleasant.

I still don’t entirely believe everything Ms. Oka told us.

But I have no evidence to disprove it.

Besides, if supernatural beings called administrators really do exist, it would explain a lot about Sophia’s behavior.

Sophia used the word “Master.”

And it seemed like she was acting on orders from whoever that is.

They’d have to be insanely powerful for someone as strong as Sophia to obey their orders.

It would make sense, then, if her “master” is essentially a god of this world.

But if I couldn’t even defeat Sophia, how am I supposed to fight back against something even stronger than she is?

If one of those things is among the forces that attack the elf village…

“What does ‘sacrifice your skills’ mean?”

Trying to drive away my invasive thoughts, I ask Ms. Oka a question.

“It is said to have two meanings. One is to use a skill called Skill Elimination to delete your own skills.”

“Is that possible?”

“Quite so. Skill Elimination can be acquired without any skill points and deletes skills over the course of several days. Once it’s been activated, it won’t stop until it’s deleted all of the user’s skills, so it can’t be used to remove just certain targets. The deleted skills can’t be recovered, either. Unless you train up and acquire them again, of course.”

“What’s the point of that, exactly?”

I don’t understand why a skill like that would exist.

There’s no benefit to losing your skills.

Even if you can get them back by training again, you won’t regain all the time you spent on them before or the skill points you might have spent to get them.

It’s like deliberately throwing your hard work down the drain.

“In other words, it transfers your power to the administrators.”

“Ah.”

So that’s it.

A way for humans to sacrifice their accumulated power to the administrators.

That’s the purpose of Skill Elimination?

“Come to think of it, didn’t you delete Hugo’s skills once, Ms. Oka?”

“Yes, but that was a glitch of sorts, a secret method for deleting another person’s skills by paying a high price. When I use it, I lose several of my own skills, and I also fall into a deep sleep for several days afterward. In the worst-case scenario, it could even kill both the target and the user, so I hope never to use that technique again.”

“I had no idea…”

Thinking back, when the earth wyrm who was Fei’s parent attacked the school, Ms. Oka didn’t participate in the battle.

Most likely, it wasn't because she didn't want to but because she couldn't.

"At the time, I thought it was the best course of action. I truly believed that if he lost all his skills, Hugo's arrogance would stop growing out of control. I know now that I should have helped him recover his humanity afterward, but I failed to do that, and now this is the result. I'm a failure as a teacher."

"It wasn't your fault."

I know that isn't much help, but it's all I can say.

Hugo is the one to blame for his actions.

"Thank you. But I know now what I must do. As his teacher, it is my job to correct my former student who has strayed too far from his path."

Our teacher's eyes are full of bitter determination.

She intends to kill Hugo.

I have no response for that.

"So what was the second meaning?"

I change the subject.

Despite feeling pathetic for not being able to do anything more.

"I'm not entirely sure. Something about sacrificing skills to bring one closer to godhood."

"That certainly sounds very religious."

"I agree."

The priest continues to shout on the streets.

As a dark atmosphere settles over us, I can't help wanting to get out of here as soon as we can.

"Shun, could I speak with you for a moment?"

Just as it's getting late enough to start preparing for bed, Katia comes to visit my room with Fei in tow.

Ms. Oka is out meeting up with the elves' allies in town.

I thought that someone should go with her, but she insisted on going alone.

Hyrince said that most likely, the people she's meeting with are part of this society's underworld.

By nature, people like that won't meet with anyone they don't recognize.

He said that was probably why Ms. Oka was acting alone.

I don't like the idea of letting our teacher get involved with such a suspicious bunch, but she informed me that sometimes you have to dirty your hands to get things done, and I was forced to reluctantly see her off.

"What is it?"

Since she chose a time to talk while Ms. Oka is absent, I can guess what it's about.

Most likely, she wants to discuss something she wouldn't want our teacher to hear.

"Mr. Hyrince, I'm terribly sorry, but could I ask you to step out?"

And it looks like she doesn't want Hyrince to know about it, either.

"Hrm. All right. I'll go kill some time at a bar or something."

"Thank you very much."

"*C*'mon, I don't mind. I'm sure you reincarnations have things you don't want other folks hearing about, right?"

With that, the ever-considerate Hyrince leaves the room.

"What about Anna?"

"I got her to go wait in the room."

Once Hyrince leaves, Katia drops the propriety and starts speaking brusquely in Japanese.

"Man, Hyrince is sooo mature. What a hunk!"

Fei dives onto the bed.

Now that she can turn into human form, she seems quite pleased to be able to sleep in a bed again.

When she was smaller, she would occasionally take over part of my bed, but after she got bigger, she had no choice but to sleep outside.

Being able to sleep in a bed again has put her in a great mood.

However, the one downside she complains about is not being able to roll over properly because of her wings.

“So? What’s this about?”

“The other reincarnations, of course.”

Katia sits down next to Fei with a grave expression.

Looks like she’s expecting this conversation to take a while.

I sit across from her and get ready to listen.

“I didn’t tell you guys at the time, but I asked Ms. Oka about the other reincarnations a few times before. She told me that there are eleven of them being protected in the elf village. She’s succeeded in contacting eight more, including us. The other six people’s whereabouts are apparently unknown.”

I vaguely remember her saying something about this when we first met.

“We know the eight she’s contacted must include us three, plus Hugo and Yuri. I’m not sure about the other three. You with me so far?”

“Sure.”

“The real problem is the last six who are missing. Ms. Oka said that four of them are dead.”

At Katia’s words, my breath catches in my throat for a moment.

It’s not like that hadn’t ever occurred to me, of course.

But hearing it become reality is still a shock.

I often wondered whether all the reincarnations had survived in a world full of threats like demons and monsters.

From what little I’ve been told, I gathered that Ms. Oka went through all kinds of difficulties to gather us reincarnations and keep us safe.

That can only mean that some of us were in enough danger to justify all that.

Which means she couldn’t get to some reincarnations in time to help them?

Now we know the answer, straight from Katia’s mouth.

“The ones who died are Kouta Hayashi, Naofumi Kogure, Issei Sakurazaki, and Hiiro Wakaba.”

At that last name, Fei sits up with a jolt.

Fei and Wakaba had an intense relationship.

Essentially, Fei did things to Wakaba that bordered on bullying.

In her previous life as Mirei Shinohara, Fei was an eye-catchingly beautiful girl, just as she is in her current human form.

However, the only person whose looks drew more attention than hers was Wakaba.

If that were the whole story, Fei probably wouldn’t have bullied her.

But an upperclassman whom Fei had a crush on at the time apparently liked Wakaba, so she ended up bullying the girl out of a one-sided feeling of envy.

Most of what she did was fairly tame for bullying, like spreading rumors or hiding her things.

And since Wakaba rarely showed much reaction, it never turned into anything more serious.

Still, bullying is bullying.

Fei once told me that she’d come to regret her actions once she was reborn.

I can’t imagine how she feels knowing that the other person involved is dead.

“Oh, sorry. I kinda…can’t quite put it into words…”

Even Fei herself seems unable to express her complicated emotions.

As I keep an eye on her, I look over at Katia as well.

Fei isn’t the only one who had a connection with Wakaba.

Katia once confessed to Wakaba, only to be met with an honorable defeat.

I think Katia half expected this to happen, and after the fact, she just smiled

and said, “I got shut down,” so I don’t think it upset her too deeply.

But still, how must Katia feel knowing that someone she used to like is gone now?

“Katia, didn’t you…?”

“Me? I mean, yeah, it’s a shock. But I dunno, it doesn’t really feel real, I guess.”

That makes sense.

We weren’t there to witness the moment of her death or anything.

It was simply relayed as secondhand information from Ms. Oka.

It’s probably natural that it doesn’t feel real.

Besides, we’ve already been in this world almost as long as we were in our previous lives.

To be honest, my memories of my classmates’ faces are starting to get cloudy.

I still remember the friends I was close with pretty well, but other than that, I’m starting to forget people who never left a strong impact on me.

Of the four dead, I wouldn’t say I was close with Wakaba or Sakurazaki, but they left enough of an impression that I still remember them.

However, I can barely even remember Hayashi’s face.

“Kogure, huh? I can only picture him crying.”

Out of those four people, I was closest with Kogure.

He was a crybaby even as a high school student, someone who would freak out over just about anything.

“Oh yeah. Just being called on in class was enough to make him burst into tears, right? That takes me back.”

Like me, Fei probably doesn’t remember much about the classmates she rarely interacted with.

I could never forget Kogure, but Fei probably hadn’t given him much thought until his name came up just now.

I can’t help feeling a little sad about that.

“When do you think he cried the hardest? When he got put in charge of taking care of the animals, maybe?”

“Right, right. He was all, ‘I can’t do iiiit!’ Or maybe that time when the teacher took away his handheld game?”

We took a moment to reminisce about Kogure’s biggest crying episodes.

“Ah…if Icchi were alive, that stupid Natsume probably wouldn’t have gone this far.”

Fei sighs.

“Icchi” is probably Issei Sakurazaki.

He was a childhood friend of Natsume, Hugo’s former self, and tended to keep him in check.

Even in our previous lives, Natsume had a pretty violent personality, but he was never as bad as he is now.

He never caused any major incidents, because Sakurazaki was there to stop him.

If he were by Hugo’s side in this world, too, our future might have been very different.

“D’you think Natsume knows that Icchi’s dead?”

“No idea. I guess it’s possible he found out from Ms. Oka somehow.”

“Maybe he did, and that’s why he went crazy. Honestly, I’m pretty sure Natsume thought Icchi was his only real friend.”

Fei was quite close to Natsume and Sakurazaki.

She must have some thoughts about the way Natsume is rampaging now.

“I wonder why. How did it come to this? I thought we all got along well enough back in Japan.”

“Being reborn in a different world would change anybody. And Hugo happened to change for the worse. That’s all there is to it.”

“But you haven’t changed, Katia.”

“Do you really believe that?”

Katia’s sudden intense gaze startles me a little.

“Look, how exactly do you see me anyway?”

“How do I see you?”

“I mean, am I Katia in your eyes? Or am I Kanata?”

“Huh? What do you mean?”

Katia and Kanata are one and the same.

I don’t know what she’s trying to ask me.

This time Katia sighs. “Oh, forget it. I just don’t know if you really think I haven’t changed or if that’s just what you want to believe.”

“Erm…I’m sorry?”

Katia seems to be in a bad mood now, so I try to make it better.

However, she only looks more annoyed that I apologized without knowing what I did wrong.

Unable to meet her glare any longer, I look away.

Instead, my eyes fall on Fei, who’s clearly stifling a laugh.

“What are you laughing at?”

Katia turns her glower on Fei.

“Oh, nothing! I’m just a spectator in this whole affair.”

Fei smirks, and Katia’s scowl deepens.

This is getting uncomfortable.

“But…that’s not all you came here to say, right?”

I change the subject, trying to clear the air.

If Katia wanted only to tell us about the four students who died, she wouldn’t have waited until Ms. Oka wasn’t around.

I’m sure there’s something she doesn’t want our teacher to hear.

“Right. How much of Ms. Oka’s story do you guys believe?”

Though she still looks a little frustrated, Katia cuts to the main question.

Is she asking whether we think the administrators are real?

“How much? I don’t think she’s lying to us. She said herself that all the stuff about the administrators is objectively just something that the elves have always believed.”

Ms. Oka asserted that the godlike beings called administrators really do exist.

However, she didn’t seem entirely convinced that they’re using this world to gain power, like the elves believe.

“It definitely sounds like a conspiracy theory to me.”

Fei seems to feel the same way I do.

“You’re saying you believe Ms. Oka but not the elves’ story about the administrators. Right?”

“Yeah, I think so.”

For one thing, if these so-called administrators can steal strength from the dead, I don’t see how the elves can possibly fight back against them.

Elves aren’t that much stronger than humans. If such a godlike power really exists, there’s probably nothing they can do about it.

Sure, elves live longer than humans and are very proficient in magic.

But frankly, that’s the only difference.

They’re not exponentially stronger than humans or anything.

How could they possibly compete with beings so far beyond human comprehension?

“But we do know that there are beings who call themselves ‘administrators.’ Even if they aren’t as all-powerful as the elves say, they’re strong enough to give people a reason to fear them.”

That’s my conclusion, at least.

Ms. Oka says that they're real, and then there's Sophia, who's apparently one of their underlings.

Sophia's power is beyond my reckoning.

If there's something even stronger than she is, that would certainly be something to fear.

"Do you feel the same way as Shun, Fei?"

"Yeah, more or less."

"I see."

Katia closes her eyes and thinks for a moment.

As if she's trying to decide whether to keep going on this subject.

Finally, she seems to make a decision.

"Shun, Fei, do you both trust Ms. Oka?"

"You don't, Katia?"

Silence.

However, Katia's complicated expression says more about her inner feelings than any words could.

"Can I ask why?"

I don't think Katia would distrust Ms. Oka without a good reason.

The look on her face says that this thought has been weighing on her heavily.

I don't think Katia really wants to be suspicious of our teacher.

There must be some grounds that would motivate her to bring up this topic now.

"Ms. Oka is hiding something. She's not lying, but she's not telling us the whole truth, either. That's the impression I get."

I was expecting Katia to have a more concrete explanation, but her words are surprisingly vague.

From the tone of her voice, she seems to know that, too.

“What d’you think she’s hiding, then?” Fei presses.

“If I knew that, it wouldn’t be a problem. But I definitely think there’s something that she can’t tell us. I mean, she said she was going to tell us everything, but there’s still so much she hasn’t explained.”

This did occur to me, too.

For instance, she hasn’t said who the reincarnations being protected in the elf village are or what their situations are like.

Or what the other reincarnations she couldn’t shelter in the elf village are doing now.

Ms. Oka has still hardly told us anything about our fellow reincarnations.

“If she’s hiding something from us, of course I want to believe she has a good reason. But facts are facts. We all know that being a fellow reincarnation doesn’t mean someone can be trusted, right?”

I know what Katia’s trying to say.

Hugo and Sophia, for instance, are reincarnations, but they’re working with the enemy.

And it’s possible that Katia is also referring to herself.

Hugo brainwashed Katia in the past.

And turned her against us.

She’s hinting that even people you think you can trust can turn against you.

“I’m not saying you shouldn’t believe her. Just…don’t trust her too much. I think we should be prepared that she might betray us.”

Katia’s words hit me like stones.

Who knew it would hurt this much to have to suspect even the people you thought you could trust?

Even knowing that Hugo was behind it, being attacked by close allies like Sue and Katia was still painful.

Sue and Yuri are still in Hugo’s hands, too.

Just thinking about that is depressing enough. If Ms. Oka betrayed us on top of that…

The only response I can muster to Karnatia's warning is a heavy sigh and a silent nod.

KARNATIA SERI ANABALD



The sole daughter of Duke Anabald of the Analeit Kingdom. A reincarnation who retains memories of her past life as Kanata Ooshima, a Japanese high school student. Though she was a man in her previous life, for some reason she was reborn as a woman. For some time, her memories of being a man were at odds with her current state as a woman, but she has gradually come to think of herself more as a woman. This came to a head when she became fully aware of her feelings due to an incident caused by Hugo. She and Shun have been close since their previous lives, and her current goal is to stay by his side and protect him.

So I'm a Spider, So What?
Character Collection



8 Returning Monster of the Week Always Gets Killed Right Away

When my eyes open, I'm floating in the ocean.

And also, I'm nothing but a head.

You might not know what that means, but honestly, I don't know what's going on, either.

I mean, seriously.

What's up with this situation?

What happened?

I mean, how can I even be alive with only a head?

Everything from the neck down is gone.

Although I don't think spiders really have necks.

Now all that's left is to stick a pin through me and put me on display.

Ugh. Unreal.

Oh wait. I guess I'm probably still alive in this state because of that Immortality skill I got when I evolved.

I bet that demon lord blew my body away, and what's left of me landed in the ocean.

Since all I've got is a head, does that mean my body was destroyed by the Demon Lord's attack?

This is just a guess, but my theory is that while I was unconscious, my HP Auto-Recovery skill started putting me back together from the particles that

were left over.

Even with the Immortality skill, I wasn't exactly gonna have the ability to have conscious thoughts if my head was smashed to pieces.

In which case, if someone has Immortality but their head is destroyed with no way to put it back together, wouldn't they still basically be dead?

Yikes!

Is it just me, or is being alive yet dead kind of scarier than death?

It's literally a living hell.

Thank goodness for HP Auto-Recovery.

Without it, I might've been screwed.

Really, the fact that I've regained consciousness now is a miracle on a number of levels.

First of all, it's actually pretty lucky that I got smashed to bits and thrown into the ocean by that attack.

If I had been left intact, she might've noticed that I wasn't really dead, and if I hadn't gotten thrown into the ocean, she might have even taken my remains home.

Alternatively, if my regeneration had started right there on the spot, she probably would've seen it.

And if she knew I couldn't die, then she could really have come up with a fate worse than death for me.

Like sealing me in concrete and sinking me to the ocean floor, or having carnivorous monsters eat me every time I come back to life.

Although I guess I technically could have experienced the latter while I was floating in the ocean.

Oh, gross. What if I've actually been eaten by something and come out the other end already?

And I don't even know the extent of how well Immortality works.

This isn't exactly likely, but if I were split apart at a molecular level, I doubt I could come back from that.

I mean, clearly I can survive as just a head, which is pretty good, but I don't want to get overconfident.

What if I got eaten and digested into molecules? Then I probably wouldn't be able to regenerate.

Well, either way, I said I don't want to get overconfident, but it's not like being careful is going to change the outcome of Immortality much.

I mean, did you see that demon lord's status?

Mother was already the kind of boss who'd show up only in an impossible game, but now there's something several times worse?

And like, saying "several times" isn't even an exaggeration.

Stats that average 90,000? What the hell?!

Get outta here!

Even power creep should have its limits!

And that's only her stats. Once you factor in the skills, well, it's beyond hopeless.

Like, maxed-out skills across the board? Who does that?

The worst part was those resistance skills.

Most of her attributes were all the way up to Nullification.

So she just doesn't take damage, huh?

What am I supposed to do about that?

Pretty sure there's nothing I can do.

Hang on—why would a demon lord come to kill me anyway?

No, I guess I already know.

The Demon Lord's species name was origin taratect.

That means she was the original taratect monster.

The zenith of all taratects, who even Mother would have to obey.

Just like my Parallel Mind told me in that emergency contact, she's even stronger than Mother, the monster we thought was the strongest of all.

She must have gotten some kind of distress signal from Mother and come to eliminate me.

Well, I guess my victory was only a matter of time, so it makes sense that Mother would request backup.

Although it doesn't explain why her "backup" was that…thing.

I mean, I don't even get how that could exist.

What the hell is that?!

That's gotta be against the rules!

Uuugh.

Seriously, what am I gonna do?

Just when I thought I'd finally escaped the Great Elroe Labyrinth, Mother's attacks have kept me too busy to enjoy the outdoors.

I thought I had a faint glimmer of hope to conquer her somehow, but then an even worse monstrosity showed up.

What kind of crappy game is this?

No waaay.

Seriously, no waaay…

Argh. Ugh. Bleeegh.

Mm'kay! Guess I should start figuring out my next move.

Things might look pretty grim, but as long as I'm alive, I gotta keep hanging on until I breathe my last.

First, let's assess my situation.

My body is currently in the gory state of being nothing but a head.

If a monster or something attacked me right now, I'd be helpless. Or would I?

My max HP is lower than usual, probably because my body's gone, but my MP hasn't changed.

So if I was attacked, I could at least use magic to fight back.

Wait a minute. If I can use magic, can't I use Healing Magic to restore my body?

I don't know if Healing Magic can bring back lost body parts, but HP Auto-Recovery seems to be able to do it, so it's worth a shot, right?

I have no idea how long it'll take me to recover completely, but until then all I can do is float around and hope that nothing attacks me.

Although I don't know how long it took for my consciousness to recover like this, so it could take ages to rebuild my body with Auto-Recovery and Healing Magic for all I know.

Actually, I wonder how long it's been since the Demon Lord blew me up?

I wasn't conscious, so it's possible that it's been days or even longer.

Maybe the Demon Lord forgot all about me in that time and wandered off somewhere?

That's probably just wishful thinking.

I can't do anything until my body is repaired, but when it comes to her, even having my body back won't make a bit of difference.

Honestly, I could challenge her a hundred times and still never win.

Even if I use Immortality to do a zombie attack, it won't make a difference if she doesn't take any damage in the first place.

I was starting to get to the point where I could beat Mother if I used a few curveballs, but that demon-lord thing? Running away is the only option I can think of.

Hmm? No, wait a sec. If I can defeat Mother, couldn't I beat her with the same method?

Thinking about it, Mother is still strong enough that I'd have to run away from her in person.

If the Demon Lord and Mother are connected as master and servant, then maybe I can use that connection to send some Parallel Minds to attack the Demon Lord, too?

That…might actually work.

Although it still won't be easy by any stretch of the imagination.

I mean, look at those stats.

She basically teleported over to me from out of the range of my perception with sheer speed.

Even if I run at top speed, she could catch up to me in a second.

And by the time I notice her presence, it'll be too late to teleport.

I'd have to just teleport around frequently so she can't figure out where I am.

Although even then, I might not be able to outpace her.

Since she's the size of a human, she can enter places that would be too narrow for Mother, too.

Maybe I'm better off just floating on the ocean like this?

I bet it's safer than being on land.

Although it wouldn't surprise me if that freaky Demon Lord can run on water or something.

Actually, she probably can.

With proper use of Dimensional Maneuvering, it's possible to run on pretty much anything.

I could do it myself if I tried, and the Demon Lord's got better stats and skills than I do, so she must be able to do it, too…

Ah-ha-ha.

There really is nowhere to run.

At any rate, I'm safe for now (or at least as safe as you can get when all you have is a head). And since I can currently savor the sweet freedom of being alive, the Demon Lord must not have noticed yet that I'm not actually dead.

Or maybe she has, but she can't locate me.

Maybe I should just do nothing and play dead for the rest of my life.

But I don't know what my Parallel Minds have been doing while I was unconscious, so it might be wishful thinking to assume she hasn't noticed me, too.

Hrm.

Guess I should contact them.

Helloooo? This is the main body speaking. Anybody there?

〖Hmm? Body, is that you?〗

Oh, we connected. Nice.

〖So you really are alive. What kind of magic trick did you use?〗

Believe it or not, I evolved and got the Immortality skill.

〖*What?!*〗

So now I'll never die!

〖Wow. Talk about a cheat code.〗

Yep. So basically, don't worry about me.

What's going on over there?

〖We're still locked in battle with Mother.〗

Wow. So that means the Demon Lord probably does know I'm still alive.

〖Hmm? Demon Lord? Is that what that monstrosity was?〗

Yep.

And also the original taratect, apparently.

With stats that were all around 90,000 to boot.

〖Geez, what kind of impossible game is that?〗

Yeah. She actually smashed me into pieces with a single attack.

Without Immortality, I really would be dead.

But it took a while for my consciousness to come back like this, so who knows what's gonna happen next time she finds me?

〖Yeah, that doesn't sound good. Maybe we shouldn't get in touch like this too often, then.〗

How come?

〖Whenever we make contact, it gets easier for Mother to detect your physical location.〗

Oh crap!

〖So we'll interfere with the signal so that Mother can't find you, and you just worry about running away. I'll contact you when we beat Mother, okay?〗

Roger that.

Over and out.

Well, at least I know what's what now.

My Parallel Minds are still in battle with Mother.

Which means, most likely, the Demon Lord already knows that I'm not dead.

I assumed she'd suspect that I'm alive, since my attack on Mother hasn't stopped.

And yet, here I am, relatively safe.

That can only mean the Demon Lord doesn't know where I am right now.

So I guess it really is safest for me to keep floating around in the ocean.

Yep. Until my body gets better, I'm just gonna pretend to be an innocent piece of seaweed.



The Elf Village

Deep in the mountains of the Sariella region lies a hidden cavern.

In the back of the cavern is a secret room disguised behind a dead end.

In this secret room in the hidden cavern, a place considerably hard to locate, is a teleport point that connects to the elf village.

It's hidden so thoroughly that we never would have found it without Ms. Oka's guidance.

Even with Appraisal, I couldn't see any hints of its existence, so I doubt anyone could find it without knowing exactly where it is.

"You must keep the existence of this place a secret, of course."

We all nod.

A powerful barrier protects the elf village, making it impossible to enter unless you use a special teleport point.

In other words, this is one of the few entrances to the elf village. If its location was revealed, it could lead to unwelcome intruders.

Most likely, no one outside of the elves and their close confidants is supposed to know about it.

Ms. Oka probably isn't supposed to show us where it is, either.

The fact that she brought us here seems like proof that she trusts us all deeply, but Katia's warning is still in the back of my mind.

Katia said we shouldn't trust Ms. Oka too much.

But she certainly seems to trust us, at least from my perspective.

Honestly, I don’t know what to do.

For now, I’m still in the ambiguous state of trusting our teacher while harboring a little bit of doubt.

“Now let us proceed.”

Ms. Oka activates the teleport point.

Light floods the room and engulfs all of us, and my vision warps briefly.

Once it returns to normal, we aren’t in the cavern anymore.

Instead, we’re inside a circular building.

There are several teleportation circles on the floor, like the one we just used.

However, the details of the building aren’t important right now.

Because as soon as we arrive, we find ourselves at swordpoint.

Several elves are holding their swords out toward us.

“Please, wait! I brought them here!”

Ms. Oka stands between us and the elves, who look ready to attack at any moment.

Instead of human language, Ms. Oka is speaking the language of the elves.

We studied it at the academy, so I can more or less understand it.

However, I can only speak it slowly and in short phrases. I doubt I’d be able to interject in a pressing situation like this one.

“Name?”

“Filimøs Harrifenas.”

The man who seems to be the captain addresses Ms. Oka curtly.

“The chief’s daughter… And why have you brought humans here?”

“They are reincarnations and comrades of the hero. The empire’s army is on its way here right now. I brought them to help us fight back.”

Ms. Oka’s explanation seems to placate the man, but he still doesn’t lower his sword.

“I see. However, we cannot allow humans into the village. If they are to participate in battle as our allies, they may fight outside the barrier.”

“They will do no such thing. These people are my guests. I will not have them thrown out into danger.”

“Daughter of the chief. I will not repeat myself. Send them back through the teleport point immediately.”

Ms. Oka and the man seem to be directly at odds.

Clearly, the elves are even more clannish than I thought.

At this rate, they definitely won’t let us into the village.

“Stand down, would you?”

Just as the tension seems about to explode, a man’s voice comes from the entrance.

As soon as we see the speaker, all of us freeze.

“Potimas?”

Ms. Oka alone murmurs the man’s name in disbelief.

Indeed, standing before us is Potimas, the elves’ chieftain who had seemingly been killed by Sophia.

“That’s right. Have you forgotten your father’s face?”

Though his words seem joking, Potimas’s face is serious.

But Ms. Oka, Hyrince, and I all saw him dead.

We saw Sophia toss his freshly severed head to the ground right before our eyes.

That gruesome sight certainly didn’t seem like a fake or an illusion.

“I thought you were dead?”

“It would take more than that to kill me. Lower your swords.”

He addresses the soldiers to give them an order.

The soldiers faithfully obey, lowering their swords and taking a step back.

“Now, then. Welcome to the village of the elves.”

Despite his words, he doesn’t appear very welcoming at all.

Honestly, I’m pretty wary of him.

Part of it is the strangeness of a man who I thought was dead suddenly appearing right in front of me, but there’s something else about him that’s strange and suspicious in a way I can’t quite place.

Besides, anyone who suddenly Appraises someone they’ve just met probably looks down on others.

This is the second time I’ve met this man.

The first time was before I went to the academy, when he showed up escorting Ms. Oka.

His attitude was awful then, too. He introduced himself and Ms. Oka, then left without waiting to hear my reply.

As he spoke, a strange sensation overcame me, but I assumed at the time that it was just a physical response to how uncomfortable his attitude made me feel.

Later, Katia identified that strange feeling as the discomfort that happens when someone Appraises you.

Appraising someone without their consent is considered a very rude breach of etiquette.

Between that and his snobby attitude, it was clear that he didn’t deem us worthy of his consideration.

As if he didn’t recognize us as people.

Even now, he seems to be viewing us more as tools of war than guests, so his gaze makes me very uncomfortable.

“Come. We shall prepare a modest reception for you.”

With these brief words, Potimas turns and walks out of the room.

We hurriedly follow after him.

“How did you survive?”

Ms. Oka asks the question that I, too, was wondering.

“There are many ways to avoid death.”

This is hardly an answer.

For a moment, I consider Appraising him on the spot as payback for the first time we met, but getting on his bad side in this situation seems like a bad idea.

“What about the imperial army?”

“They haven’t yet reached the outskirts of the barrier. As of now, they are marching through the forest.”

As he speaks, Potimas exits the building.

Following him, the rest of us are at a loss for words when we lay eyes on the scenery outside.

All around us is a forest composed of such large trees that they might well be more than a thousand years old.

The roots of the gigantic trees have been carved out to form homes.

Looking back at the building we just left, I realize that it, too, is actually a giant tree.

The elf village isn’t just a bunch of buildings in a forest. It’s built into the trees themselves.

“Wow,” Katia murmurs involuntarily.

It’s as if we’ve wandered into the world of a fairy tale.

However, countless eyes soon glare at us, drawing us back to reality.

From atop the branches and in the shadows of the trees, the elves are watching us closely.

I can feel the wariness and disgust in their gazes.

It’s a fresh reminder that we’re not welcome here, as if the swords pointed at us when we arrived weren’t enough.

Concerned, I look back at Anna.

For me, this is just a rather unpleasant welcome. But for Anna, a half elf, this

place is full of painful memories.

Being glared at like this on top of that could easily unearth more trauma.

Anna is putting up a brave front, but her hands are trembling slightly.

I press close to her, trying to shield her from the piercing glares.

Potimas moves on briskly, paying no attention to us.

As we follow him, Ms. Oka asks him about the current situation.

“Do you know how large the imperial army is?”

“Around eighty thousand.”

This is a surprise to me.

Is it really safe for them to send such a large army in the midst of the human-demon war?

No, it almost certainly isn’t.

And yet, the army is already well on its way.

If the demons find out about this development, I doubt they’ll miss such an opportunity.

This situation is even more disastrous than I thought.

“The trouble is that the church has provided a considerable amount of their soldiers. The fact that they’ve announced a false hero like Hugo shows that they are deeply tied to the empire.”

If the Word of God army has joined forces with the empire, that must mean that Hugo has the church held firmly in his fist by now.

Most likely, the brainwashed Yuri is with him, too.

“If their march proceeds smoothly, how soon do you think they’ll arrive?”

“Three days, I would imagine. If they’re attacked by powerful monsters or anything of the like, it might be another story, but unfortunately luck seems to have taken their side.”

I tilt my head quizzically at Potimas’s odd statement.

“The legendary-class monster who has threatened our village for years, the queen taratect, is on the move. As a result, all of the other monsters in the area have fled. The imperial army will likely run into few monsters, if any, on their course here.”

Another queen taratect?

The queen taratect is said to live in the Great Elroe Labyrinth, but there are four others in the world as well.

From the sound of it, one of them lives in this very forest where the elves make their home.

The elf village is at the heart of a vast forest called the Great Garam Forest.

According to Ms. Oka, the village and the barrier that protects it are about the size of the special wards of Tokyo.

And the forest, since it’s big enough to hide that at its center, is easily the size of Hokkaido.

There are many monsters in the great forest, and the queen taratect rules as the most powerful of all.

Unfortunately, since the queen taratect has moved and driven away all the nearby monsters, this works in the army’s favor.

If the queen taratect had stayed behind and maybe even run across the imperial army, that would have been much more favorable for the elves.

As for me, I’m half-disappointed and half-relieved.

We caught a glimpse of the queen taratect’s terrifying power on the way here.

When we left the Great Elroe Labyrinth, I looked down and saw the place where a queen taratect had once burst free and gone on a rampage.

The destruction was so severe that it had permanently changed the landscape.

If that thing had run into the imperial army, the latter would most likely have taken devastating casualties.

The elves would have triumphed without needing to fight at all.

But that would also mean that soldiers who are only being used by Hugo would be killed in droves.

There might even be people among them who are brainwashed, like Yuri.

When I think of it that way, I'm almost happy with these results.

I know how naive that is.

If we really do have to fight, it'll be kill or be killed, even if the soldiers are innocent.

But some part of me can't help hoping that if we can just do something about Hugo, the rest of it will work out somehow.

At the very least, I might be able to save my brainwashed friends from him.

There might even be more of them besides Sue and Yuri who have been brainwashed unbeknownst to me.

As I think about it, my hand automatically clenches into a fist.

"We're here."

Potimas enters a house built into one of the huge trees, cutting the conversation short.

Inside the house is a large circular desk, creating a conference room of sorts.

As soon as we sit as instructed, elven waiters carry food to our table.

"These are elf dishes, but they should suit the human palate, too."

At Potimas's words, I take a bite of the food.

It's lightly seasoned and vegetable focused, but that only serves to highlight the quality of the ingredients.

In fact, it's delicious.

Exhausted from our journey, our party eats without speaking.

"You seem to have enjoyed it. Good."

Seeing that we've finished eating, Potimas speaks again.

“We have prepared quarters for you. I shall ensure that you can go about your business there until the imperial army arrives.”

They seem very well prepared.

Almost as if he already knew we were coming.

Which he probably did, I suppose.

I don’t know how he got that information, but it’s the only explanation that makes sense.

Otherwise, how would they prepare living quarters and just the right amount of food for humans with such perfect timing?

And yet, we were greeted so harshly when we first arrived.

Did the information not reach the teleport-point guards, or was that just an act?

Either way, I can’t figure out Potimas’s intentions.

All I know is that he seems very shady.

Maybe that’s why I can’t help but distrust Potimas’s next proposal.

“Additionally, I’m sure you would like to see the other reincarnations, no? The hour is late. I shall arrange for you to meet them tomorrow.”



9 WATER SPIDER

I've been drifting on the waves for a few days now.

My body is finally back to normal.

Man, I certainly had my work cut out for me.

I got attacked by water wyrms, attacked by water dragons…

Seriously, that was no laughing matter.

Getting attacked by a bunch of water wyrms wasn't an issue at first.

I mean, it wasn't ideal, but I managed to deal with them even in head-only form, so we'll call it even.

Yep. Turns out I actually got by pretty well without a body.

Alone, my head could still use magic, making this situation sort of like one of those tower-defense games where you have to shoot down the enemy before they get too close.

Occasionally a few persistent buggers broke through, but I used my Telekinesis skill to move myself away.

In short, I was managing all right.

That just goes to show that wyrm-class monsters aren't even a threat to me anymore.

Some of the upper-level ones had stats averaging more than 2,000, but I still beat them without even having a body.

Talk about using your head!

It definitely helped that my go-to weapons, the Dark Magic spells, were just as

powerful when used underwater.

The water didn't dampen or slow them down at all. Maybe it was because of the fantasy-like nature of the Dark attribute.

I mean, Fire definitely wouldn't have worked, and if I'd used Lightning or something, I would've just zapped myself, too.

The water wyrms did have Wyrm Scales, but the difference in our stats was so great that they might as well have been wearing paper armor.

Since my magic attack power exceeds 10,000, I guess it's no surprise that their measly 2,000-and-under defense wouldn't stand a chance.

Anyway, I was able to deal with the constant onslaught of water wyrms easily enough.

But then that water dragon showed up.

Listen, I was as surprised as you are.

I mean, seriously.

A goddamn dragon isn't supposed to spawn as naturally as if it were some ordinary mob.

It looked kinda like a plesiosaur and seemed pretty strong at that, but when I Appraised it, I was still taken aback by its power.

I suppose the silver lining was that it was still a fair amount weaker than Araba.

Using Telekinesis to move my head away, I fired at the water dragon with magic as it chased me.

This little game of chase went on for what felt like hours, until I finally managed to beat it.

Lucky for me, it was the physical-based meathead type.

It wasn't fast enough to catch up to me, either, and its magic wasn't all that, so I didn't die even when it grazed me a few times.

Though if it had made a direct hit, I probably would've been knocked out and ended up as fish food.

Who knows how long it would've taken for me to recover again?

All's well that ends well.

Anyway, thanks to the experience I got for killing the water dragon, I leveled up.

You couldn't really call it molting, since I didn't have a body to shed skin from, but the usual level-up recovery situation did make my body grow back.

I can only imagine how gross it would've looked to any witnesses as my body grew from the stump of my head.

But even leveling up wasn't enough to fully regrow my body. I got only about half my torso back before it stopped.

From there, I spent several more days fending off those stupid water wyrms while using Healing Magic to fix the rest of my body.

I could've done without the occasional bonus water dragon, by the way.

Unlike the first one, I just ran away from these ones.

I mean, these guys were on the same level as the earth dragon Araba.

How was I supposed to deal with something like that when I was still regrowing my damn body?

Besides, I could float, but I couldn't dive.

Since my opponents could move around in the water freely, I was at a huge disadvantage. It made no sense to try to take them on.

Turned out there was a Swim skill. If I acquired that, I thought maybe I'd be able to dive down.

But if I tried to pick it up, probably because of my lack of aptitude or whatever, it would cost a huge amount of skill points.

I didn't want to waste the points, so I gave up on that and decided to just run away from water dragons instead.

Even now that my body's fully recovered, taking on a water dragon sounds like a huge pain. Instead, I've just been fleeing from them.

Bwa-ha-ha! Kneel before the power of my full-speed escape!

With my incredible speed stat and the trump card known as Teleport, fleeing from the likes of a water dragon is a piece of cake!

Although I'm trying not to use that too often, since the last thing I want is to teleport right into the Demon Lord's waiting hands.

That's why I'm still floating around on the ocean.

According to the map function Professor Wisdom gave me, the waves carried me pretty far away from the Great Elroe Labyrinth, but I'm still keeping the same degree of distance from the shore.

Right now, I'm thinking about riding the waves farther away from the Great Elroe Labyrinth, then eventually making land somewhere or other.

I think I've lost the Demon Lord by now, and if she's gonna look for me, she'll probably check in or around the Great Elroe Labyrinth.

If I get far away from there, I'll run less risk of being found.

If I keep out of her sight, make land somewhere far away, and keep increasing the places I can flee to via Teleport, even that crazy Demon Lord shouldn't be able to catch me.

Even with her insane teleportation-like speed, it's not like she's actually teleporting.

Sound-barrier-breaking speed or no, it still takes time to cover that much land, so I'd like to think that I could use that time to use Teleport and get away.

The main reason I can't necessarily escape her yet is that I don't have enough options for Teleport destinations.

The only places I can teleport to right now are inside the Great Elroe Labyrinth or a limited range of the surrounding area.

The Great Elroe Labyrinth is Mother's territory, and outside it, my options are extremely limited.

Within that small range, the Demon Lord could easily track me.

So if I extend my teleport range outside where she can track me, I should

eventually be able to lose her completely.

Putting it that way, I think the ocean is actually a pretty good escape option, too.

Even the Demon Lord probably wouldn't think to check some random part of the ocean.

Although I guess you can't exactly call it safe when there are water dragons here.

After drifting around for a few more days, I finally came up on land again.

Man, I've never been happier to feel ground under my feet in my life.

Floating on the ocean was getting pretty uncomfortable.

Part of the reason I came up on land was that I got fed up with that, but there was also the minor detail of the water dragons beginning to attack me in swarms.

I mean, you guys are a pretty powerful class of monsters, right?

Are you even allowed to form cliques?

Like, I can't even swim underwater, you know? I'm basically a spider-shaped buoy.

So yeah, I decided I was done with that and escaped onto the land.

Fighting a single dragon is enough of a pain. I definitely don't wanna mess around with a whole group.

Being on land has its own threat in the form of the Demon Lord, but since she doesn't seem to have found me yet, I should be fine.

I've got to worry about the more imminent threat.

Namely, the buttload of water dragons that have locked on to me. Even now that I'm on land, they're still sticking their heads out of the water to glare at me.

I can practically hear them yelling, *And don't come back!*

I guess that's the end of my watery adventures in relative safety from the Demon Lord.

From here on out, looks like it's land or bust for me.

The Demon Lord could have spies anywhere, which means I'd better try to avoid being spotted as much as possible.

My first goal is to find a river.

Why, you ask?

Well, if you spend a lot of time in the ocean, you end up soaking in seawater, y'know?

And seawater really clings to you.

I have the Odorless skill at least. That helps with the ocean smell, but I've still got crusty salt all over me.

Nobody likes being crusty.

Oh right, Odorless is a skill I got when I maxed out Silence.

Just as the name implies, it reduces my scent. The higher the skill level, the less I smell.

Pretty good skill for an assassin, right?

Although it could come in handy in everyday life for some people, too.

Thanks to that, I don't have to worry about getting smelly.

Not that this body really produces a lot of odor in the first place.

Anyway, I'm gonna go look for a river or pond or whatever to wash up.

I'm careful to minimize my presence as I move, though not so much that I drive myself crazy worrying about it.

Even when I was super-weak, I was stealthy enough to sneak around the den of monsters known as the Great Elroe Labyrinth pretty well. Now that all my skills have gotten even higher, my stealth has gotten even…worse, actually.

Because come to think of it, I got that stupid Intimidation skill and the Fearbringer title, which pretty much cancel out all that by announcing my presence to everyone nearby.

No matter how much I hone my stealth skills now, the best I can hope for is to

cancel out the double-fear effect.

Frankly, whether I'm sneaky or not, there's only so much I can do to keep from being found.

Meaning there's no point in being super-extra-careful.

If someone spots me, I'll cross that bridge when I come to it.

Just like in the labyrinth, monsters and stuff tend to sense my presence and run away before I even get near them.

To the point where it sometimes even causes a mass exodus.

I think that might just be their animal instincts or whatever, not something that's affected by stats.

Even weak monsters like frogs were able to sense me coming, after all.

If anything, the weak monsters might have even sharper instincts about it.

Assuming I keep traveling on land, I think I'll eventually cause a mass migration of all the monsters in the area.

In the labyrinth, that effect almost resulted in my running out of food.

But right now, I'm more worried about it helping the Demon Lord find me.

She probably…no, definitely would.

If a huge monster stampede appears out of nowhere, there's no way that demon lord won't notice.

Even if she can't specifically detect my presence, all she'd have to do is look for the center of the disturbance to figure it out.

And once she does, she'll definitely come find me.

At which point I'll be killed on the spot.

Hmm. That puts me on a pretty short time limit.

I have to expand my range somehow before she spots me, then start teleporting around to keep my whereabouts hidden again.

As I contemplate these things in my wanderings, I find the river I was hoping for.

My body feels so gross and sticky at this point that I just dive right in without thinking.

I plunge underwater for just a moment before popping back up to the surface.

I create some thread, easily weave it into a cloth, and use it to wipe myself down.

I didn't pay too much attention when I got dirty back in the labyrinth, but if I have the option of keeping clean, I'm definitely going to take it.

Washing off in running water is nice, but what I'd really like is a nice hot bath.

I don't know if there's even such a thing in this world, but still.

If not, maybe I could at least find a hot spring?

Once this whole thing with Mother and the Demon Lord is settled somehow, I'm definitely going to look for one right away.

No, I guess finding delicious food comes before that.

After I went to all the trouble of getting out of the Great Elroe Labyrinth, I haven't found a single tasty thing to eat!

This is a serious problem!

That's all Mother and the Demon Lord's fault, too!

They've totally ruined my dreams of a happy-go-lucky outside life!

I mean, I wanted to make it outside for so long, and now that I'm finally here, what do I get? A super-stressful life on the run!

It's just not fair.

Based on my original schedule, I should be enjoying a nice, relaxing sightseeing trip by now.

Scenic forest and mountain views!

Nope, Mother blew those away with a breath attack.

How about a nice trip to the ocean?

Sorry, it's peak water dragon season.

It’s not fair; it’s just not fair!

Why does the threat of imminent death follow me wherever I go?!

Not to mention that if I stop for a minute, the Demon Lord might catch up to me.

How am I supposed to relax with all that going on?!

At any rate, I have to do something about the Demon Lord and Mother if I want to survive at all, not to mention live happily from here on out.

I activate Wisdom to check the Demon Lord’s current location.

Heh-heh-heh. That’s right. You think I’m just going to sit by and let myself be killed?

If I successfully Appraise a target, I can use Professor Wisdom’s marking function.

That allows me to check the location and Appraisal information of anything I’ve Appraised once, even if it’s far away.

Combined with Wisdom’s map function, I can find out at a glance where the Demon Lord is.

As a bonus, when I use this feature, my map expands to include wherever the target is currently located.

I can’t actually teleport to those places unless I’ve been there in person, though.

So it looks like I still have to travel around myself to increase my number of potential Teleport destinations.

Just as I suspected, it looks like the Demon Lord has figured out that I’m still alive because my Parallel Minds haven’t stopped attacking Mother.

It seems as though she went back to where she blew me away, and she looked around to figure out where I went.

And now she’s traveling over the ocean.

Man, even Sherlock Holmes would be jealous of those tracking skills.

How did she figure out so quickly that I was in the ocean?

I guess maybe it's a good thing that the water dragons chased me onto land.

Luckily, it seems like at least she doesn't know where exactly in the ocean I was, meaning she's just scouring the whole thing right now.

Scary.

I think I know how a criminal feels when they're being chased down by a great detective.

But if she's on the ocean, maybe this is a good opportunity for me.

Couldn't I go work on reducing Mother's number of minions while she's too far away to return to the Great Elroe Labyrinth immediately?

I don't know how much bigger her army got while I was drifting around like dead seaweed, but even if she laid some new eggs, I doubt they've grown enough to be a threat yet.

With my current strength, she'd need arch taratects or higher if she wants to put a scratch on me.

Even greater taratects would be a bit of a pain in large enough numbers.

But the biggest threat of all her minions is still that puppet spider.

I mean, I can say with confidence that I can beat an arch taratect one-on-one now.

I have a definite advantage over them, no doubt.

My stats and skills are a cut above, aside from the arch's physical stats, after all.

But that's not the case with the puppet spider.

After encountering it and escaping quite a few times, I've been slowly figuring out that thing's nature.

First, it's a spider, but it's also not really a spider.

It's a human-shaped doll, like a mannequin, with a spider about the size of a fist in the center.

The spider has thread throughout the mannequin's core and uses Thread Control to make the thing move.

Although it's a spider, it fights more like a human by nature.

For one thing, a spider that has weapons should definitely be against the rules.

Plus it's got six arms, Asura-style, and each one of them is holding a damn sword.

It's pretty good with those swords, too. Like, I don't think it should be allowed to call itself a spider at this point.

I mean, sure, I'm pretty far removed from a normal spider myself, but that thing doesn't even *look* like one anymore.

Its skill makeup is different from the archs and the rest of the spider army, too.

Most significantly, it has weapon skills now and other upper-level skills that seem more suited for a human than a spider.

I have fought humans before, but I basically just trampled them with the sheer difference in our stats. I can't say that was a very educational experience.

To be honest, I can't read the puppet spider's movements at all.

If anything, I can just barely manage to evade its attacks with the golden combo of Future Sight and Thought Super-Acceleration.

Not to mention, it's got those nasty stats that exceed 10,000 across the board.

At least it doesn't have a type advantage over me or anything, but in terms of sheer power, things aren't looking too good.

Like, the only stats I have that are nearly that high are my magic stats.

And aside from that and speed, all my other stats are waaay lower.

Plus, even if my speed is decent, I don't have much yellow instant stamina, meaning I can't keep up my top speed for long.

In other words, magic is the only area where I have it beat.

If I want to win against that puppet spider, I definitely can't do it head-on.

I might be able to pull it off with my tried-and-true method of setting lots of traps, but if I want to do that, I have to clear out the rest of the spider army first.

In the end, I'm stuck just slowly but steadily whittling down those numbers.

For now, as long as the Demon Lord is off searching the ocean, I guess I'll head back to the labyrinth and wreak a little havoc.



The Reincarnations in the Elf Village

The day after we arrive in the elf village, Ms. Oka brings Katia, Fei, and me to a certain location.

Honestly, I didn't really want to leave Anna alone when she has such horrific trauma associated with this place.

However, considering where we're going now, we thought it was best if only us reincarnations went.

When I explained all this to Hyrince, he told me confidently that I could count on him, so we left Anna and him behind.

Our destination is a special protected area.

The place where the reincarnations are kept in order to protect them.

"Ms. Okaaaa, are we there yet?"

Fei complains.

I suppose we have been walking for a pretty long time.

With Fei's high stats, I doubt she's actually worn out from that. But none of us realized it was this far away. I can't blame her for being a little bored.

"Just a bit farther. The elf village is quite large, you know. Please try to be patient."

Frankly, it's so large that I don't know if it should be called a "village" at all.

But I suppose that makes sense when you consider that most of an entire race's population is concentrated here.

It's so massive that it would take an entire day to travel from one end to another.

When you think of it that way, the distance to the reincarnations' area might even seem small by comparison.

"Still, I can't believe there's a barrier big enough to cover this entire place. It must take some incredible magic."

"Yes. Thanks to the barrier, the elf village has never been attacked before."

"How exactly does it work anyway?"

"I'm sorry. I don't know that much about it myself."

Normally, I'd expect Ms. Oka to know these things, but I guess it is a matter of national security.

"What I do know is that it's so strong that even an attack from a queen taratect can't affect it. In the long history of the elves, it's never once been broken."

It can withstand a direct hit from a queen taratect?

That surprises me, but it also makes sense.

The queen taratect is in the strongest class of monsters.

When one appeared in a battle between humans and demons a while ago, it trampled both sides indiscriminately.

And the queen taratect's destructive power permanently altered the terrain around that Great Elroe Labyrinth exit.

If one of those same monsters lives in the Great Garam Forest, it's only logical that the barrier would have to be strong enough to hold it off.

Otherwise, the history of the elves would probably have ended by now.

"Considering how long they live, the elves must have a pretty long history, right? How far back does it go, exactly?"

"I don't know. But from what I've heard from my grandfather, who is the eldest in the village at five hundred years old, the barrier already existed in the time of his own grandfather."

"Wow, that's amazing."

I can’t imagine living through that much history.

In fact, much of the history of this world has been lost.

This is partly because books are often destroyed in the constant wars between humans, and unlike on Earth, paper here degrades very quickly.

Since it’s difficult to preserve books, the history we do know is extrapolated from the few remaining documents or passed down through oral tradition.

And it’s hard to say how much of that is true, since many of them seem to contain fictional stories and fairy tales.

In which case, the long-lived elves might be important living witnesses to history.

However, since the elves are so closed off from the rest of the world, most of them probably never even leave the elf village, meaning they might not know that much about human history.

“Do you think Hugo can get through the barrier somehow?”

That barrier has been protecting the elf village for such a long time that it’s like a part of history itself.

Does Hugo really think he can break through something that powerful?

Does he know something we don’t?

“I’m not sure. However, just because it’s never been broken before doesn’t mean it’s impossible. We mustn’t rely on it too much.”

If anything, it sounds like Ms. Oka is assuming the barrier might break.

That gives me the impression that Hugo knows some way to break it.

And Ms. Oka must know about it, too.

Otherwise, she wouldn’t have had us go on such a dangerous journey through the Great Elroe Labyrinth to defend the village.

Not if she thought its barrier was unbreakable.

I remember Katia’s warning again.

Ms. Oka is still hiding something.

At this point, I think Katia is probably right.

There's clearly a line somewhere between what she's telling us and what she's keeping to herself.

"From what you've told us, it's hard to imagine any human could break such a barrier. Do you believe Hugo has some kind of secret weapon?"

Katia cuts in sharply.

Of course. If it's obvious to me, then it must be doubly obvious to Katia.

"Again, I don't know. However, he most certainly knows that there is a barrier around the elf village. Surely even Hugo wouldn't bring such a large army here if he wasn't confident that he could break through the barrier. I suspect that he must have some kind of method in mind, though whether it will actually work is another story."

Her analysis certainly makes sense.

I can't find a single contradiction in that logic.

Still, it's not quite enough to dispel my doubts completely.

Katia, too, narrows her eyes while Ms. Oka isn't looking.

Fei says nothing, unable to keep up with the tension between the lines of the conversation.

I keep quiet, too, afraid I'll mess things up if I say any more.

"Ah, there it is!"

Luckily, just as an awkward silence starts to fall over us, our destination comes into view.

I mentally heave a sigh of relief.

That kind of battle of wits just isn't my forte.

Instead of being full of trees like the rest of the forest, the area Ms. Oka points at is a brightly lit clearing.

In most of the forest, the huge leaves and branches block out the sky.

But in this one area, instead of trees, all that's growing are vegetables.

It’s a farm.

Tending to the field are a few young boys and girls, right around our age.

There seems to be livestock, too, with a few more people taking care of them.

Noticing us, one of the girls stops working and approaches.

“Welcome back, Ms. Oka.”

“Thank you.”

The pair exchanges greetings in Japanese.

This girl really is a reincarnation.

But although hearing Japanese should warm my heart, there’s a slight chill in the air somehow.

The girl’s greeting was very curt.

And Ms. Oka’s expression seems rather stiff as well.

“So? Are these three new victims or what?”

The girl’s words make the atmosphere even colder.

“Victims? Of course not.”

“Well, that’s your opinion. From my perspective, you’re definitely the villain… But whatever. You three, what are your names? I mean from there, not here.”

Coldly rejecting Ms. Oka, the girl turns toward us.

She looks at Katia and me, then turns suspicious when she sees Fei.

“I’m Shunsuke Yamada.”

“Mine is Kanata Ooshima.”

“I’m Mirei Shinohara, as if you didn’t already know.”

“Huh?”

She furrows her brow, but I can’t tell whether it’s because Katia is a woman now or because Fei’s appearance is incredibly similar to how she used to look.

“Wait a minute. Ooshima?”

“That’s right.”

“Wow…”

Her reaction seems involuntary.

“Excuse you! What kind of reaction is that?!”

“You’re right, sorry. It just surprised me, that’s all.”

“Well, now that you know who we are, shouldn’t you introduce yourself, too?”

As Katia sulks a little, Fei cuts in with slightly narrowed eyes.

“As if I can’t already tell from your attitude.”

“Fair enough. It wouldn’t be very polite to ask your names and not return the favor, would it? Sorry about that. I’m Sachi Kudo.”

“I knew it.”

Fei sighs rather irritably.

Sachi Kudo.

The girl who was our class rep.

We weren’t particularly close, but she stood out in class because of her blunt nature.

Since she was monstrously strict about the rules, she had a lot of enemies, too.

And since Fei tended to be a bit of a mess in various ways, they butted heads pretty often.

“Why do you look so much like your old self, Ms. Shinohara?”

Apparently, Kudo did notice that Fei looks a lot like she did in her previous life.

Since it’s been such a long time, I wouldn’t be surprised if some of us forgot one another’s faces, but I guess she remembered an old foe.

“Oh, y’know. I guess even death couldn’t take away my beauty.”

“Give me a real answer, please.”

Fei’s 100-percent lie is even more obvious because of the silly pose that comes along with it.

Kudo immediately shoots her down.

Now that’s a nostalgic exchange.

“Seriously, I dunno why I look like this, okay?”

Fei refuses to drop her jokey attitude, and Kudo continues to glare at her suspiciously.

“Mirei?”

“Huh? Is that really you?”

A few others notice our presence and drop their work to join Kudo in gathering around us.

Two of them notice Fei’s appearance and call out to her.

“Hmm? Wait, is that Ai and Himi?”

“You guessed it!”

“Oh my god, so it really is you, Mirei?! Wow, it’s been sooo long!”

Reunited with their old friend, the girls jump up and down with excitement.

Fei was the center of a particularly flashy group of girls and had a lot of friends.

It’s been more than ten years, yet they immediately clump together and chatter away like it’s the most natural thing in the world.

Honestly, I think that level of sociability is pretty impressive.

“At any rate, let’s not keep standing around out here. Everyone, let’s put today’s work on hold for now and go inside.”

Kudo directs the first half at us and the second at everyone else.

“Are you coming, too, Ms. Oka? Not that you’re particularly welcome.”

I can’t help but feel a twinge in my heart at her harsh words.

It was clear from the beginning that Kudo strongly dislikes Ms. Oka, but I can't understand why her rejection is this intense.

Since she was the class rep in our old world, Kudo spent a lot of time with Ms. Oka, and I seem to remember them being pretty close.

Something must have happened between them in this world to cause such a large rift.

As I dither uncertainly, Katia calmly looks around at the situation as a whole, while Fei stares right at Ms. Oka.

"Right…I understand. Well, I would hate to put a damper on everyone's reunion, so I'll take my leave here."

With that, Ms. Oka quickly turns away.

Her expression looks as if she's forcing a smile while holding back tears.

"Let's go."

Ignoring our teacher, Kudo starts walking.

Looking around, I see that several of the other students are looking at Ms. Oka with hard-to-read expressions.

But nobody makes any move to call out to her.

As we start off in the opposite direction, I steal a glance at Ms. Oka as she walks away.

I've never seen her look so small.



10 Playing with Dolls

These days, my life basically involves moving in and out of the Great Elroe Labyrinth.

When the Demon Lord is getting close to catching up with me, I use Teleport to return to the labyrinth, where I work on reducing the ranks of Mother's army.

Then, when the Demon Lord gets an SOS from Mother that I'm causing trouble and comes back toward the labyrinth, I teleport outside again.

And so on and so forth.

Apparently, even the Demon Lord can't catch up with me as long as I have Teleport and the ability to monitor her location.

Still, if I let my guard down, she'll catch me for sure, meaning I have to use Exhaustion Nullification to stay awake around the clock.

The skill keeps my body from getting worn out even if I don't sleep, but the lack of rest is pretty tough on my spirit.

Besides, the Demon Lord is no fool, so she's been taking measures to put an end to this game of cat and mouse.

Specifically, the number of puppet spiders has increased.

The puppet spiders are under the Demon Lord's command, separate from Mother.

In addition to the one that Mother already had, the Demon Lord has thrown in *ten* more of the damn things.

Even just one was a headache in itself, and now I have to deal with eleven?

Come on—give me a break.

Half the new puppet spiders are on guard in the Great Elroe Labyrinth.

The other five are outside pursuing me, as I found out the hard way.

The Demon Lord was returning to the labyrinth, so I teleported back outside only to find a puppet spider waiting for me.

I managed to escape with my life somehow and even succeeded in Appraising it so I could mark the thing on my map, but one wrong move and it would've been curtains for me.

In fact, I took enough damage that I would be dead right now if it weren't for Immortality.

Long live Immortality!

However, the situation is getting worse by the minute.

The Demon Lord and her puppet spider tracking team are constantly on my tail, and in the Great Elroe Labyrinth, I've got Mother and six more puppet spiders to contend with.

Mother's not as strong as she used to be, but at the same time, I'm running into the puppet spiders more and more often.

At this rate, I'll eventually be backed into a corner with no more places to run.

So I have to somehow reduce the number of puppet spiders before that happens.

Right now, I could beat Mother if given enough time, but the Demon Lord is nearly invincible, and the puppet spiders all have higher stats than I do.

I'm definitely outclassed here.

But I have to do something, or I'm done for.

Who cares if they're all stronger than me?

I've been fighting enemies who far outclassed me all my life here.

There's no point in wimping out now.

Thus far, I've been able to beat enemies who are stronger than I am through a

combination of resourcefulness and sheer guts.

The resourcefulness to make various traps using my thread and the guts to never give up, no matter how bad the situation.

It's no exaggeration to say that those are the two things that have kept me alive all this time.

I'm just going to stick with what works.

For the moment, I can't beat a puppet spider in a fair fight.

But I've come up with a trap that might do the trick.

Anyway, that's what's on my mind as I'm running around like crazy.

Fleeing from the Demon Lord and the puppet spiders, slowly whittling away the spider army.

And now, I've been chased into a dead end.

The Great Elroe Labyrinth, Upper Stratum.

I'm in a small dome-shaped room, surrounded by six puppet spiders.

To an onlooker, this probably seems like a desperate situation.

The dolls likely think they have me cornered, but what they don't know is that they've been drawn right into my trap.

I've been playing tag in the Great Elroe Labyrinth for longer than usual in order to lure all six of the puppet spiders here into one place.

It might look like these dumb dolls have secured my escape route, which isn't wrong, but if that same route gets sealed off, they won't be able to escape, either.

And so: Earth Magic, activate!

I close the only way out with Earth Magic.

Now this little room is totally sealed off.

And with that, it's time for even more magic!

Spatial Magic: Spatial Storage!

This is basically one of those Item Box–type spells that store items in a separate dimension, but I've never had to carry things before, so it was basically gathering dust.

But this time, I've got a little something stored away in there.

A whole bunch of seawater.

I release the seawater into the little room while stashing away the air that was in there instead.

The seawater fills the entire room, submerging it completely.

Just as I predicted, the puppet spiders can't swim, so they're pressed against the ceiling.

For whatever reason, my body is composed in a way that makes it extremely buoyant.

Even if I try to dive underwater, I just pop right back up.

I started thinking, even if they're not the same exact race, wouldn't other spider monsters have similar properties?

To test my theory, I captured a single small lesser taratect from the spider army and tested it out in the ocean.

Sure enough, it floated on the water just like I did.

That wasn't a guarantee that the puppet spiders would work the same way, but it looks like I won that bet.

The puppet spiders are helplessly buoyed up against the ceiling.

On top of being pressed forcefully against the ceiling because of their natural makeup as spiders, the thread they use to control the puppets' limbs is damp, hindering their movements a little.

And I'm observing all this from the bottom of the room.

Heh-heh-heh.

That's right. In order to carry out this strategy, I paid the high cost to acquire the Swim skill!

Now, I can more or less dive underwater.

I can't really swim around freely, though, since the skill level is super-low.

Still, it works well enough to make this plan a success.

Now that the puppet spiders can't move, I fire Black Magic at them.

I figured out when I was fighting the water wyrms and dragons that dark-related magic isn't affected by water.

Apparently, Dark Magic hits the puppet spiders with the same power it would have on land.

No matter how high their stats are, if they can't move, they can't put those stats to use.

And since I can move underwater, they can't hit me with magic of their own, either.

Wait, no, I spoke too soon.

Since my Swim skill level is low, I can't really get around fast enough to dodge all their magic.

But that's okay.

My magic defense is high, so even the puppet spiders' magic attacks don't do much damage.

Wait, sorry, I was wrong again.

I'm actually taking a lot of damage.

I mean, those guys are really strong, y'know?

Even with my high magic defense, of course they're going to cause some damage.

But that's still all right.

Having the puppet spiders aim their magic at me is an important part of the plan.

See, stats that exceed 10,000 can cause so much damage that they could basically bring about a natural disaster.

If they tried, I'm pretty sure the puppet spiders could make this whole room collapse.

That's why I wanted to give them a target to attack, so that thought doesn't occur to them.

Basically, I'm using myself as bait.

If the puppet spiders calmed down a little, they would probably prioritize destroying the room.

But since I'm right here before their eyes, and attacking them at that, of course they'll want to destroy me instead.

Especially if they're panicking because they can't breathe.

As I attack the puppet spiders, I take little hits of the air I stored away earlier.

That way, I won't suffocate.

But what about the puppets?

I doubt they can breathe underwater.

Last time I checked, spiders didn't have that convenient little feature.

I mean, we're not fish.

Normally, our bodies are constructed in a way that we can't even go underwater.

Their high stats might give a boost to their lung capacity or something, but no living thing that needs air can survive without it for long.

And the more they move, the faster they run out of oxygen.

Since they're locked in a magical shoot-out with little old me, they'll be out of air in no time flat.

I don't need to get rid of their HP with magic.

All I have to do is keep their attention on me and wait for them to run out of air.

The trade-off is that I have to take some hits from their magic, but between my high magic defense and my Perseverance skill, I calculated that I should be

able to endure.

Even if I take more damage than I expected, there's always the last resort of Immortality.

And even if they do manage to kill me temporarily, they should be completely exhausted by then themselves due to the lack of air.

I doubt they could muster enough strength to destroy the room then, and even if they do, it'll just cause a cave-in.

In their weakened state, that means they'll be buried alive.

Sure, I'll get buried along with them, but I have Immortality, so I won't actually die.

Worst-case scenario, it's possible I'll stay buried and lose consciousness permanently, but you can't fight a far stronger opponent without taking on some degree of risk.

The puppet spiders are stronger than I am, even though I'm clearly kicking their butts right now.

In fact, I'm almost surprised that it's going this well.

One of the puppet spiders starts flailing its arms, attacking the ceiling.

But with water soaking into its limbs and the thread that controls them, it doesn't appear to be able to move very well.

It strikes its weapons sluggishly against the ceiling, but since there's so little strength behind the blows, it's not even making a dent.

Just to be safe, I fire more magic at the struggling puppet spider, hindering its movements.

Then, as the puppets drown, their resistance slows down and finally stops completely.

Since I've defeated six much stronger opponents at once, my level shoots up right away.

Still, I Appraise each one just to make sure they've all breathed their last.

All six have turned into corpses.

No matter how high your stats are, sometimes death can come for you unexpectedly, just like this.

This time, it worked out in my favor, but I also have to remember never to underestimate a foe just because it's weaker than I am.

At any rate, I've successfully wiped out a bunch of annoying enemies all at once.

My opponents who still remain: the Demon Lord, Mother, and the other five puppet spiders.



The Reincarnations Gather

Kudo leads us into a dining hall.

Like the rest of the elf village, it's built inside a large tree.

This one is particularly big, but it's still cramped because of all the desks and chairs inside.

Somehow, it reminds me of the outdoors school I went to for junior high.

Inside the dining hall, four other kids are already cooking.

One of the boys notices us and pauses.

He seems skeptical when he looks at Katia and me, but his eyes widen when he notices Fei.

Even after all these years, it seems like a lot of people remember her well.

I guess that probably has to do with how intense she is.

"Kudo, are those three by any chance…?"

"Yes, they are."

Kudo calls the four people over from their cooking.

Everyone goes to what I assume are their usual seats, while Kudo brings the three of us to the front of the dining hall.

"First of all, could I ask you to introduce yourselves again?"

"I'm Shunsuke Yamada."

"Kanata Ooshima."

"And I'm Mirei Shinohara, obviously."

As soon as we finish introducing ourselves, the whole room erupts into chatter.

Inevitably, most of the eyes in the room seem to be on Katia.

“Shun and Kanata? Is that really you?”

It’s the same boy who was cooking earlier.

“Yeah.”

As soon as I answer, his face breaks into a grin.

“Good to see you, man!”

Something about that smile gives me déjà vu.

Though his features are different, I’d recognize that genuine friendliness anywhere.

“Ogi?”

“Yep, it’s me. How could you tell?”

“You’re the only person I know with such a goofy smile.”

Kenichi Ogiwara, also known as Ogi, smiles even harder.

He’s a friend from back in the soccer club.

Incidentally, his nickname is based on his surname because his first name was too similar to Kengo Natsume, Hugo’s old identity.

After Ogi, the rest of the class introduces themselves.

Some of them I missed dearly, while others I admittedly can barely remember.

All in all, there are thirteen reincarnations here.

That’s two more than the eleven Ms. Oka told us about before.

The two newcomers are Kunihiko Tagawa and Asaka Kushitani.

“You two were adventurers?”

“’Course. If you’re in a fantasy world, you gotta go on adventures, right?”

“I’m not sure about that…”

Tagawa and Kushitani were apparently mercenaries before they came here.

Specifically, both their parents belonged to their own mercenary groups, so they grew up as childhood friends.

However, those mercenary groups were wiped out in a battle against demons.

After that, the pair decided to switch from being mercenaries to being adventurers, striking out on their own.

During their journey, they were contacted by the elves, and that's why they came here.

They only arrived in the village quite recently.

"Wait, why are you a babe now, Kanata?"

"That's what I'd like to know."

Katia's shoulders sag.

Evidently, she's the only person whose gender changed.

"Whatever, at least you're still human. I'm a monster, you know!"

Fei starts talking about herself, and the girls all flock to her.

For some reason, this leads to their touching her wings and shrieking.

She always was the center of the girls in the class, one way or another.

Before long, the girls have all gathered around Fei, while the boys all gather around Katia and me.

Of the thirteen people here, there are five boys and eight girls.

It seems like the boys are a little self-conscious about being outnumbered.

We start exchanging information.

"So that dumbass Natsume is coming to attack us?" Tagawa asks incredulously.

"Yeah."

I nod gravely.

“Natsume, huh…?”

Ogi’s face clearly shows his conflicted emotions.

He was good friends with us but also with Hugo.

It’s only natural that he would be shocked to learn that one of his old friends has changed so drastically.

The other boys were dismayed as well, but I could see in their expressions that they weren’t quite as surprised.

The old Natsume wouldn’t do anything as insane as Hugo is doing now, but he always had a pushy, disagreeable personality.

Many of the boys privately disliked Natsume, even if they didn’t dare say it aloud.

That’s probably why the majority of reactions were along the lines of “Yeah, I’d believe it.”

“Did the elves not tell you what’s going on in the outside world?” Katia asks.

Ogi hesitates for a second before responding.

“Yeah. They try to have as little to do with us as possible.”

“I see. What was with that weird pause, though?”

This time, Ogi exchanges glances with the other guys.

“Uh, sorry if I was acting weird. It’s just, it’s hard to believe a pretty girl like you is really Kanata, y’know?”

The other guys all nod in agreement.

Katia’s expression is difficult to read.

“Yeah, I guess it would be, huh.”

“Crap, I’m sorry! I know it’s not like you chose to be a girl or anything, and I’m sure it’s been super-hard for you! It’s just that you kinda seem like a different person now…”

Ogi’s panic makes it painfully clear that he has no idea how to interact with Katia.

“That’s all right, dude. Just talk to me like you would’ve normally, okay?”

“That’s easy for you to say…”

“If it bothers you that much, I’ll just go join the girls. Okay?”

“No, please stay here.”

Ogi is practically tripping over himself now.

It’s all too obvious why he wants her to stay.

I mean, Katia is almost stunningly beautiful.

I’m sure he’s excited just to be able to talk to someone that pretty.

“Shun, you traveled here with Kanata and Shinohara, right? Man, I’m so jealous. You’ve got a girl for each arm!”

Ogi turns on me to complain.

Even though one of those girls is right in front of us.

“But one of ’em is Kanata, and the other one’s…well…Shinohara.”

At least Tagawa’s defending me.

“Besides, is it just me, or are all of us reincarnations totally hotter than average?”

At that comment, I take another look at the faces of the people around me.

He’s right, actually: Every one of them is quite good-looking.

I was pretty plain in my old life, and aside from standouts like Fei and Wakaba, most of my classmates were similarly average-looking.

But while there’s a wide variety of appearances here, overall everyone is gorgeous.

Maybe the gods who reincarnated us wanted to do us all a favor.

“You’re right. Guess you shouldn’t be complaining, huh?”

Katia nudges Ogi teasingly, and he throws his hands up jokingly in surrender.

For a moment, it’s almost as if we’re back in our old lives.

But that’s just an illusion, of course.

We've all spent the same amount of time in this world by now.

"So most of you were basically kidnapped by the elves and brought here?"

Katia's voice brings me back to the present. While I was busy getting absorbed in emotions, the subject changed to how everyone got to the elf village.

Ogi and the others nod.

"Everyone's situation is a little different, but yeah. A lot of us were sold by our parents for money. I heard Temarikawa actually did get kidnapped."

This revelation makes me feel a little dizzy.

I always believed in Ms. Oka and her efforts to protect the reincarnations, but now it's clear that there's a dark side to that.

My classmates were traded or captured like slaves?

Katia, on the other hand, seems strangely calm.

"Aren't you shocked?"

"I mean, yeah, I guess. But I had my suspicions."

Katia was suspicious of Ms. Oka from the beginning.

She must have had a lot of theories.

Including the unsavory things Ms. Oka might have done in the process.

I remember something Sophia said when we faced off against her.

She told Ms. Oka, "*You've done plenty of killing yourself*."

Back then, I knew there had to be a good reason for that, and I still don't believe that our teacher would kill anyone without a reason.

But at the same time, I can't deny that my doubts about Ms. Oka have only been growing.

I want to trust her, but I can't, at least not completely.

Should we really be protecting the elves at all?

Of course, if Hugo attacks this place, I have to fight to protect the reincarnations who live here.

Besides, I have my own reasons for wanting to defeat him.

But what am I supposed to do after that?

From what I've heard so far, pretty much no one here is satisfied with the way things are.

They're constantly being monitored by the elves.

Based on what they've told us and the work they were doing earlier, they seem to be living more or less self-sufficiently here.

They grow vegetables in the field and raise livestock for meat.

If they need something that they can't get here, the elves will give it to them, but for the most part, they take care of things themselves.

Most of them were brought here when they were babies or otherwise too young to be aware of the world around them.

At that age, the elves took care of them, but their presence gradually lessened, and now they rarely make contact outside of surveillance and providing supplies.

"They don't want us to do too much, I guess," Ogi says.

He's probably right.

The elves don't want the reincarnations to raise their skills.

Because of their battle with the administrators that Ms. Oka told us about.

But is that really the only reason?

Is that enough to justify committing crimes to gather the reincarnations and force them into this lifestyle?

There must be something else we don't know about.

Is Ms. Oka hiding it from us?

And is that for our own good or not?

I have no idea.

But for right now, the situation with Hugo is more important.

Once that's done, I'll have to confront Ms. Oka once and for all.

Even if it means making enemies of the elves.

Anxiety eats away at me as I listen to Ogi and the others.

The excitement of reuniting with old friends went on for hours, and we ended up renewing our bonds until the sun went down.

This means that I've met most of the reincarnations now.

There are only two left who I haven't seen yet, aside from the four who are apparently dead.

One of those two is a close friend of mine and Katia's, Kyouya Sasajima.

When Ms. Oka told us about Sophia, she said:

"Her name is Sophia Keren. And in her previous life, she was Shouko Negishi. She is one of the reincarnations who has sided with the administrators."

One of the reincarnations who has sided with the administrators.

Doesn't that mean that there are other reincarnations besides Sophia who have done the same thing?

Thinking back, when I asked Ms. Oka about Kyouya, she blatantly dodged the question.

Does that mean he's one of them?

Did she know about that and hide that information from us?

If so, it would explain a lot of things.

Unfortunately.

I haven't talked to Katia about this yet.

I'm sure she reached the same conclusion long before I did.

And knowing Katia, she's probably thought it through even further than I have.

About why Ms. Oka would have kept that from us.

Until now, I always believed that if Ms. Oka was keeping secrets, it must be

for a good reason.

I didn’t think she would ever hide something from us, unless she had to.

There had to be some reason that she couldn’t tell us, for our own sakes.

But after hearing the other reincarnations’ side of things, now I’m not so sure.

What if I was wrong, and she was keeping this information from us not for our sakes but for hers?

Did she avoid telling us about Kyouya because it would be inconvenient for her if we knew?

I really want to trust her.

But more and more, I’m not sure if I can.

Would all this doubt clear away if I got to see Kyouya again?

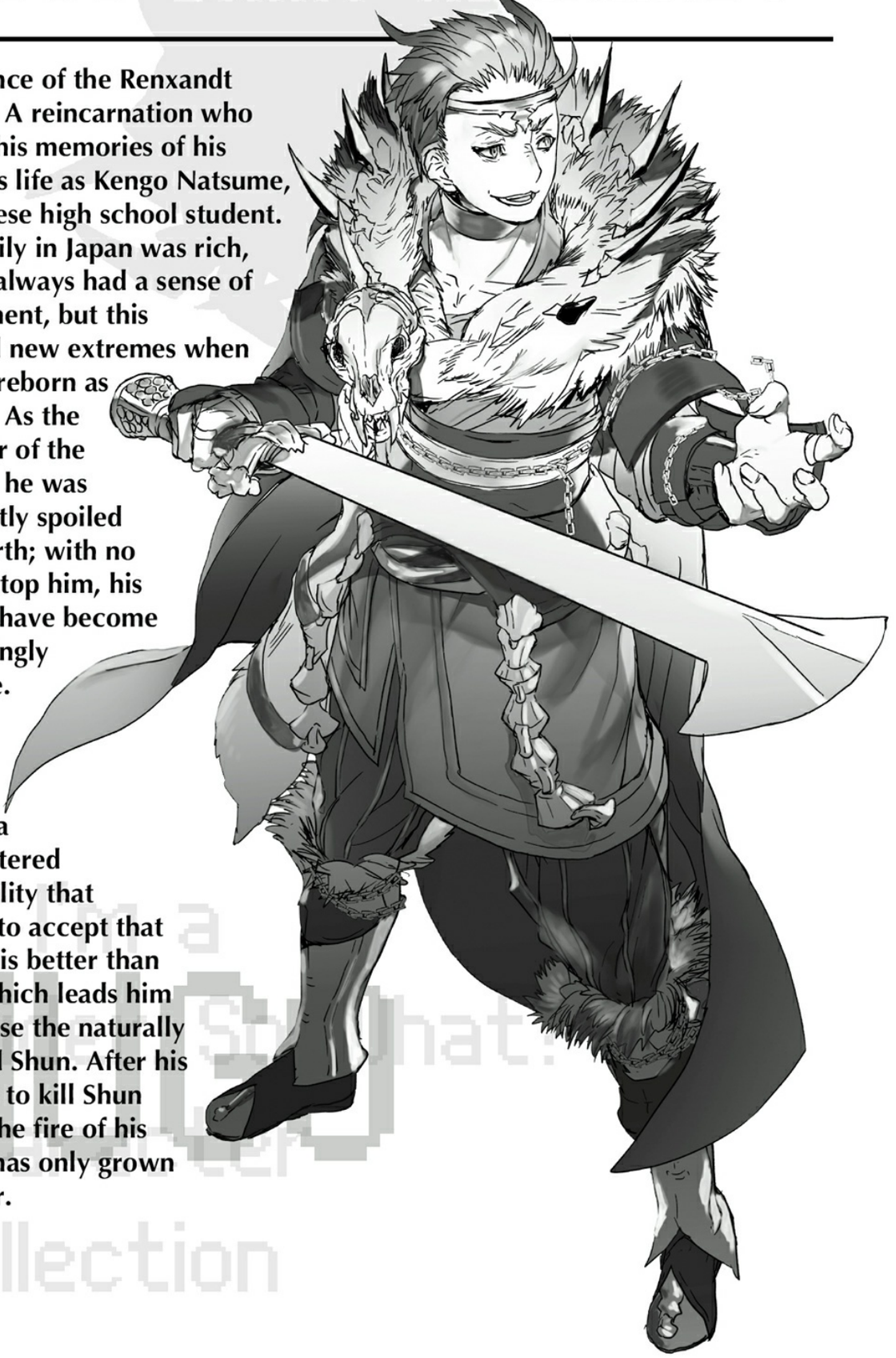
Hey, Kyouya.

Where are you right now? What are you doing?

If we meet again, will it be as friends? Or as enemies?

All these questions go unanswered.

HUGO BAINT RENXANDT



The prince of the Renxandt Empire. A reincarnation who retains his memories of his previous life as Kengo Natsume, a Japanese high school student. His family in Japan was rich, and he always had a sense of entitlement, but this reached new extremes when he was reborn as royalty. As the sole heir of the empire, he was constantly spoiled from birth; with no one to stop him, his actions have become increasingly extreme.

He has a self-centered personality that refuses to accept that anyone is better than he is, which leads him to despise the naturally talented Shun. After his attempt to kill Shun failed, the fire of his hatred has only grown stronger.



THE ADMINISTRATORS' REINCARNATION

ALLIES

"Hey."

"Oh? Are you allowed to come over here?"

"As long as it's not for too long."

"I see. Well, what do you want?"

"How rude. I'm here to give you a message from your master, I'll have you know."

"…And what is that message?"

"'You'll be punished later.'"

"…What is this about?"

"Beats me. Shouldn't you know better than I would?"

"There are too many possibilities to choose from!"

"Maybe it's because you laid a hand on Ms. Oka?"

"That was justified self-defense."

"Oh yeah? I dunno how justified it was, if you ask me. But if you're gonna make excuses, tell it to your master, not me."

"Master would never listen to my excuses."

"True enough. Why don't you just accept your punishment, then?"

"I don't wanna!"

"Not sure if you have much of a choice."

“La-la-la, I can’t heeear you!”

“Don’t be such a baby.”

“Oh, shut up, you. Anyway, make sure you don’t mess up taking down the elf village, got it?”

“How could that possibly fail?”

“I suppose you’re right, but still. Didn’t two particularly bothersome reincarnations just join that little group?”

“Yeah. Tagawa and Kushitani.”

“And they were adventurers, were they not? I’d imagine they’re somewhat strong.”

“Only somewhat, at best.”

“Well, I hope so, for your sake.”

“You saw for yourself, didn’t you, Sophia? Even the hero can’t come anywhere near our level.”

“I suppose. But remember what Master said? Stats aren’t everything.”

“Right, right. No matter how much higher your stats are, that doesn’t mean you can’t lose. I know, okay? I won’t let my guard down.”

“I hope not. I’m sure those elves are hiding something. You wouldn’t wanna die because some stupid thing caught you off guard, would you?”

“’Course not. Oh yeah, speaking of the hero, I heard he and his little party are in the elf village now.”

“Oh? I thought I made it quite clear to them last time that they can’t possibly beat me.”

“They probably just figured they still can’t give up, right? That would be so like Shun.”

“Hmmmm.”

“You don’t sound too interested.”

“That’s because I’m not.”

“Well, I’m pretty interested, personally.”

“What, because you were friends in our old lives?”

“Yeah. I can’t wait to see the look on Shun’s and Kanata’s faces when we meet again.”

“Well, don’t let that nonsense distract you from our main order of business, all right?”

“I know.”

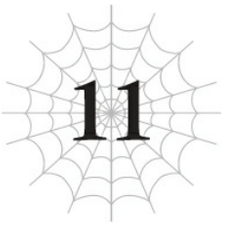
“Good. I’m looking forward to it, then. I want to see you go on a real rampage.”

“Don’t mind if I do.”

“Maybe I’ll even put in a serious effort for once.”

“Ooh, scary.”

“Either way, the elf village is going down whether we make an effort or not. Master is coming, after all.”



Matricide

Things are going great right now!

Bwa-ha-ha!

Ever since I wiped out all those puppet spiders at once, I haven't been able to stop smiling.

After that, I succeeded in destroying another one, too.

The Demon Lord found out very quickly about the six puppet spiders I killed and took countermeasures of her own.

She dispatched the last remaining puppet spider in the labyrinth to go on the defensive.

I drowned that one, too, of course.

The Demon Lord must have told it how the other ones went down, because it already had the Swim skill when I found it.

But that didn't make much of a difference.

I blocked it off, filled the room with water, used Short-Range Teleport to get out of the room, and waited.

And then, what do you know!

The small room caved in, and there you have it! One puppet spider, buried alive!

I figured the same trick probably wouldn't work twice. This time I made a hasty exit so it would try to destroy the room and escape.

Once I wasn't in the room anymore, there was no need for it to wait around in the water.

It would naturally try to escape by breaking through the walls or ceiling of the room.

But what it didn't know was that I'd already done some deconstruction work in the room to make sure it would collapse easily.

There you have it, a lovely little room where rocks and dirt would fall everywhere if you so much as poked the walls.

It was an easy job with a little Earth Magic tampering.

Then I just had to teleport the buried puppet spider away, dirt and all.

Right into the magma of the Middle Stratum, of course.

Man, it wasn't easy. On top of the large amount of weight to teleport, there was also the puppet spider's magic resistance to deal with, meaning my MP shot waaay down.

But since the puppet spider was damaged by the cave-in on top of being encased in earth, I was able to finish the spell before it crawled out.

Ding! One magma-fied puppet spider, coming right up.

Just to be safe, I went to the Middle Stratum myself to make sure the stupid doll was dead, and guess what? It had somehow made it out of the magma alive!

I guess all the earth I teleported along with it actually ended up protecting it a little.

Still, its whole body was charred, the thread inside had burned away, and the mannequin shell had carbonized around it.

It probably would've died if I'd left it alone, but of course I had to finish it off myself to get those tasty experience points.

That's seven puppet spiders I've defeated now.

There are four left, but I'm starting to get the hang of beating them.

The Demon Lord seems to have caught on to this, too, though. She's got the last four traveling together now.

Taking on four of them at once definitely won't be easy, so I'm avoiding them

for the time being.

But since they're working in a group now, that means their search range has narrowed considerably.

I've been avoiding them pretty easily and expanding my range outside while I'm at it.

The Demon Lord is still hot on my trail, but as long as I keep tabs on her and run away with Teleport, she's not going to catch me unless something goes terribly wrong.

I keep exploring outside to expand my Teleport options, then popping back into the Great Elroe Labyrinth to do some spider hunting whenever the Demon Lord gets too close.

I can't do anything about the insane powerhouse that is the Demon Lord herself, but it's her forces that are getting whittled away right now, not mine.

Teleport is so convenient it's a little scary.

In fact, Spatial Magic and Dimensional Magic in general are pretty broken.

It's only thanks to them that I can keep hoodwinking the Demon Lord like this.

Not to mention I used them to defeat the puppet spiders, too.

Meanwhile, Mother is running pretty low on soldiers.

She doesn't have a single arch or greater taratect left to her name.

There are still a few regular adult taratects left, but those don't even count as a threat anymore.

The Demon Lord seems to have given up on stationing puppet spiders in the labyrinth, meaning I've been able to rampage as much as I please.

As a result, Mother is the only real fighting force the Demon Lord has left in the Great Elroe Labyrinth.

And even Mother is on thin ice.

I use Professor Wisdom's marking feature to Appraise her from a distance.

<Queen taratect LV 89
(Weakened)

Status:

HP: 6,488/6,488 (MAX 24,557) (green) +0 (details)

MP: 5,911/5,911 (MAX 22,301) (blue) +0 (details)

SP: 6,134/6,134 (MAX 23,097) (yellow) (details)

: 6,134/6,134 (MAX 23,991) (red) +0 (details)

Average Offensive Ability: 6,456 (MAX 24,439) (details)

Average Defensive Ability: 6,447 (MAX 24,286) (details)

Average Magical Ability: 5,872 (MAX 21977) (details)

Average Resistance Ability: 5,869 (MAX 21,946) (details)

Average Speed Ability: 6,433 (MAX 24,400) (details)

>

I'll leave out the skills and all, but her stats have gone way down.

It's all thanks to my Parallel Minds' hard work.

Sure, her stats are still all around 6,000, but compared to the original numbers, that's a huge step down.

They're almost at a quarter of their original values by now.

I mean, 70 percent off? That's like a store-closing-sale-level value right there!

That giant beast has lower stats than the puppet spiders by now.

I, on the other hand, have been leveling up like crazy with all the fighting I've been doing.

I'm now level 24.

That was really fast, considering how recently I evolved.

It's probably because I've been beating super-strong monsters all over the

place, like arch taratects, greater taratects, and of course those puppet spiders.

And in the ocean, I beat a bunch of water wyrms and even water dragons. It's only natural that my EXP has gone up a ton.

If anything, it's surprising that this impressive killing spree didn't get me any higher than 24.

It's probably because it takes longer to level up after so many evolutions.

Anyway, with all that leveling up, my stats are now as good or better than Mother's current stats.

My magic attack and defense are more than 19,000.

Before you know it, I'll break the 20,000 range.

In fact, my MP is already there.

The next-highest stat is speed at 13,000.

There's another one that broke 10,000 and outclasses the puppet spiders now.

Now if one chases me, I can run away on foot!

Oh, but my SP is a little low at 4,500. I'd probably lose if it came down to a battle of endurance.

I guess Teleport is still the better option.

My HP is 7,500.

Physical attack and physical defense are at 5,000.

These physical stats and my SP are a little lower than Mother's, but all my other stats are higher than hers.

My magic-related stats in particular are almost three times higher than hers.

Honestly, with my current stats, I think I could even beat a puppet spider in a one-on-one, no-traps-allowed, totally fair fight.

Hey, doesn't that mean I can beat Mother, since her stats are lower than a puppet spider's?

Yeah! Let's go fight her right now!

Mother, I'm about to surpass you once and for all!

She's currently located in the Bottom Stratum of the Great Elroe Labyrinth.

I've never been there, so I'll have to walk.

The giant pit where I had my epic showdown with Araba contains a shaft that leads down to the Bottom Stratum.

I climb down that hole until I finally reach the deepest part of the whole dungeon, the Bottom Stratum.

Unlike the other stratums, the Bottom Stratum is just one big space.

There are no paths, only a big dome-shaped area.

The ceiling is probably hundreds of feet high.

It's so big that you can't even see the end of it with the naked eye.

I could probably see it with Clairvoyance, but I'm not going to do that right now.

Mother is standing calmly right before my eyes.

Seeing her up close and in person, I'm again reminded of how huge she is.

The first time I saw her was right after I was born.

At the time, all I could do in the face of her majestic appearance was tremble in fear.

To be honest, I'm afraid even now.

Her size alone makes her very intimidating.

Now that's a genuine giant monster.

Each of her eight enormous eyes looks as big as my whole body.

She is the absolute largest monster I've ever seen.

She could squash me just by stepping on me with those huge legs.

Yep. That's a monstrosity, all right.

If she wasn't in a weakened state, there's no way I ever would have challenged this thing to a fight.

Even now, I’m starting to think I might’ve jumped the gun a bit.

Her eight eyes glare right through me.

Eek?! Scaryyyy!

Come on, me! Don’t wimp out!

I’m the one with the higher stats now!

There’s no way I can lose!

Mother takes one heavy step forward, then raises a huge front leg.

No fancy moves here. You couldn’t call this anything more than a stomp.

However, this is the super-giant Mother’s stomping we’re talking about.

The sheer force of her physical mass is coming down straight toward me.

Sure, her stats are lower.

But it’s not like she weighs any less because of it.

I can’t even imagine how many tons she weighs, but I know one thing: If she tramples on me with all her weight, it’s not going to end well for me.

However, my speed is more than double hers now.

I can dodge this without a problem.

Or so I thought.

By the time I notice what’s happening, it’s already too late.

My legs won’t move.

Not because I’m frozen out of fear or anything.

They’re just stuck to the ground, totally immobilized.

As if my feet are attached to the floor somehow.

Startled, I look down.

Then I see it.

I’m not standing on the ground at all.

What I thought was the ground was actually thread, stretched all over a

portion of the floor.

A spider's thread, the exact same color and texture as the ground.

None of my skills can change the color or texture of my thread.

However, Mother has a higher skill for that than I do.

Divine Thread Weaving.

The highest class of thread-related skills.

The most powerful skill a spider can have.

She covered the entire surface of the floor with thread woven into a cloth-like shape, then used the Concealment skill to disguise the fact that it was thread.

And as soon as I stepped on it, its adhesiveness activated.

It captured my legs, just like that.

Honestly, it's no different from birdlime.

Such a simple trap, and I fell for it completely.

I can't believe I was so careless.

I should have known by now.

No matter how much stronger an enemy is, there are plenty of ways to beat them if you catch them in a trap.

That's how I've consistently beaten strong opponents until now.

But this time, I'm the one caught in the trap.

And although my opponent is in a weakened state, by all rights she's originally much stronger than I am.

No matter how much lower her stats are, her skills are still going strong.

I shouldn't have taken my enemy so lightly.

She's the reigning queen of spiders, who specialize in traps.

Her huge leg swings down toward me with a roaring sound.

I just barely manage to dodge it by cutting off my caught legs.

I don’t know if fighting thread with thread is the best idea, but I used Cutting Thread to slice through my own legs and escape the trap.

However, while I avoided Mother’s attack, my self-injury reduced my HP by a lot.

I quickly use Healing Magic on the middle joints where I cut off my legs.

Since I can’t land on the floor, I use Dimensional Maneuvering to run through the air and put some distance between Mother and myself.

But as I try to do so, my body is pulled back toward her.

Mother has opened her huge mouth and is sucking in air.

The catfish in the Middle Stratum used this same technique.

I’m guessing she’s using the Satiation skill to inhale large amounts of air and pull her opponent toward her.

When the catfish did it, I barely felt a pull at all.

But this time, my opponent is Mother, whose stats and size are beyond comparison to the catfish.

I’m blown backward as if hit by a typhoon, raging winds dragging my body toward Mother’s mouth.

Either her stomach or her fangs await me on the inside.

I activate Wind Magic to neutralize the suction, then use Repellent Evil Eye on my own body to propel myself away from Mother.

I’m so busy resisting the pull that I have no time to heal my legs.

But as I desperately struggle against the gale-force winds, they suddenly stop all at once.

Immediately, a chill runs through my body.

I attempt to flee, making no effort to hide my fear.

Seconds later, something invisible shakes the entire room.

It’s the large amount of air that Mother just inhaled.

She used her Expel skill to fire it out in a ball.

It’s just air.

But it’s still too much.

The mass of compressed air rocks the Bottom Stratum with power equal to the giant breath attack Mother did before, crashing through my body.

I managed to avoid taking a direct hit.

And yet, my body is racked with pain.

Just the shock wave was enough to cause a ton of damage.

Lowered stats or no, Mother is far more powerful than any monster I’ve ever seen.

I manage to catch myself in midair to try to reposition myself.

But I don’t have time, because just then the floor comes flying up toward me.

Or rather, the thread that’s been made to look like the floor.

It shoots right at me in hot pursuit.

I try to escape upward, only to be dumbfounded by what’s coming down toward me.

The ceiling is falling.

Or rather, the thread that’s been made to look like the ceiling.

It wasn’t just the floor.

The floor, the walls, and the ceiling have all been covered in thread.

And now everything is closing in on me.

I’ve got nowhere to run.

The tidal wave of thread bears down on me, enveloping my body without even giving me a chance to resist.

Since it’s completely wrapped around me now, I can’t cut off a limb and escape this time.

To do that now, I’d have to cut up my whole body.

But if I don’t escape, I’m going to be crushed.

I have Immortality, so I won't die, but if I get knocked out, the Demon Lord will definitely catch up to me.

Then it'll really be the end for me.

Even with Immortality, there are ways for her to deal with me for good.

I try to calm my panicked feelings and think of a way out.

If I don't hurry, Mother is going to trample me.

I use Black Magic to try to break through the thread, but it doesn't work at all.

This thread must be unbelievably tough to withstand my magic attack power of 18,000 without so much as a scratch.

I realize now how terrifying it is to be on the receiving end of the thread I've relied on all this time.

I try to teleport, but I'm too panicked to make the rune properly.

On top of that, since it's a complicated spell, it takes a while to create the rune.

I doubt Mother will spare me for even that short amount of time.

Abruptly, the magic construction I was working on dissipates.

Why?!

No, I can't panic.

This is no time to hold anything back!

Rot Attack!

I apply Rot Attack to my scythe and cut up the thread.

Even Mother's thread is weak to Rot, so I'm able to cut through it.

However, it's like cutting through cloth with dull scissors.

I put all my strength into cutting through the thread with my scythe, then into using Fire Magic to tear through the remaining thin, sticky layer.

Once I get my tattered body free from the restraints, I'm greeted by the sight of Mother's foot.

As it speeds closer, it fills my entire field of vision.

There's no time to avoid it.

I think I hear some kind of sound, like a *crunch* or a *snap* or a *splat*.

Somehow I manage to get my head out intact, while the rest of my body is crushed under Mother's foot.

It's the return of the decapitated spider head.

I use Telekinesis to float my head through the air.

But it's difficult to control. I can't move the way I want to.

I've been having a hard time activating my magic, too.

The reason for all this is Mother's Dragon Barrier skill.

It's a skill that produces a barrier with the same properties as Dragon Scales and its related skills.

In other words, it interferes with the construction of magic.

It's basically like my kryptonite.

Normally, this skill would make a barrier around only the user's immediate vicinity, but she's expanded its range to prevent me from invoking magic.

Even with Height of Occultism, I can't use complicated spells in this condition.

Which means I can't use Teleport.

I can't escape.

I've got nothing but a head left.

My magic is being partially blocked.

I'm doomed.

No matter what I do, I can't see any way out of this situation.

The tidal wave of thread bears down on me again.

Mother starts charging up her breath to finish me off.

If I get killed now, temporary or not, I'll never wake up again.

Unbelievable.

This is what I get for naively thinking I could win this fight without any preparation just because my stats are higher.

After all the times I've trapped and defeated others, now I'm the one caught in a trap.

I guess this is karmic retribution.

My punishment for getting carried away.

My life flashes before my eyes.

When I was born as a spider, I ran away from Mother and my siblings' bloodbath.

I made a home, only to have to run away when humans burned it down.

The humans chased me until I fell into the Lower Stratum.

And then I ran away again, this time from Araba.

I ran away from the terror of the Lower Stratum by escaping into the Middle Stratum.

Once I got back to the Upper Stratum, I was thrilled to finally not have to run away all the time.

But once I got outside, my life consisted of running away from Mother and the Demon Lord.

Ha-ha. In retrospect, most of my life as a spider consisted of running away from things.

I didn't want to run away. I wanted more than anything to get strong enough that I wouldn't have to do that anymore.

But despite my hopes, I still spent my whole life on the run.

Yet in the end, I'm going to die because I walked right into a trap.

It's so stupid I could almost laugh.

I've got nothing to be proud of.

I'm nothing like Araba, which died satisfied, knowing it'd done everything it

could.

I wanted to keep living.

I didn't want to die.

So I kept running away from anything that could kill me.

I stood my ground only when I had nowhere else to run or when I knew I stood a chance of winning.

I never knowingly went into a truly hopeless battle of my own free will.

I was always on the defensive, never starting a fight I knew I couldn't win.

Even when I fought Araba, I made careful preparations and challenged it only when I was confident I could win.

But I neglected those preparations this time.

And Mother was even more determined than I expected.

I figured the Demon Lord was at least as intelligent as a human, since she used spoken language. I should've guessed that her subordinate Mother would be fairly smart, too, especially considering what I've seen her do so far.

And yet, I was convinced that I could beat her, just because my stats were higher.

That was my fatal mistake.

And Mother didn't miss that chance, even though her very soul was being devoured, which she'd surely never experienced before.

I have no doubt that having your spirit get devoured is more terrifying than I can imagine.

But Mother didn't give up, even with her power disappearing by the second. She kept struggling, clawing for victory until it finally came into her grasp.

Come to think of it, that's the same way I won when I was backed into a corner all those times.

I never expected us to have something like that in common.

If it wasn't for the fact that I'm her current victim, I'd probably be like, *You go,*

Mom!

But this is it for me.

After all that running away, I'm going to die in the stupidest, most anticlimactic way possible.

I can't turn things around now.

But I'm not gonna go down that easily!

You'd better believe I'll keep fighting until my very last breath!

At the very least, I'll make sure Mother always remembers me as a powerful foe who kept her on her toes till the end!

If she does, then it'll seem like my life had a little bit of meaning.

Now, time to struggle in vain for all I'm worth…!

〖I like that attitude!〗

Suddenly, a voice rings out in my head.

It's one of my Parallel Minds, who've been fighting a spiritual battle with Mother this whole time.

She must have noticed that I was in a pinch and returned to this body to help out.

But just having one Parallel Mind come back won't be enough to make any difference…

At that moment, an incredible amount of power surges through me.

Wh-whaaaa…?!

What just happened?!

〖Well, where do you think all of Mother's lost stats went?〗

My prodigal Parallel Mind, the former magic brain number one, sounds decidedly pleased with herself.

If she had a face, I'm sure it'd be wearing a smug grin right about now.

〖Heh-heh-heh. During the fight with Mother's spirit body, we started eating it.

A spirit body is really just a soul. And stats and skills are the soul's power, right? It only makes sense that eating her soul would give us the power she's lost, y'know?〗

So you mean that for every bit Mother's stats went down, my stats went up?

〖Eeexactly!〗

Former magic brain number one sounds gleeful.

At the same moment, all the other Parallel Minds that were fighting Mother come back to me, too.

And as a result, my stats rise up unbelievably high.

〖Now, time for our counterattack!〗

On magic brain's command, all the Parallel Minds start building magic together.

The resulting spells completely defy Mother's Dragon Barrier, tearing through the approaching tidal wave of thread like it's made of paper.

Then Mother's breath attack is met head-on by a breath of my own, which pushes it back and blows her away.

Even I'm stunned by my own power.

Multiple Healing Magic spells kick in at the same time, growing back my lost limbs in little more than an instant.

Still half in shock, I take a fresh look at my stats.

<Zana Horowa	**LV 24**	**Nameless**
Status:	HP: 21,622/21,622 (green) +0 (details)	MP: 29,618/29,618 (blue) +0 (details)
	SP: 17,097/17,097 (yellow) (details)	: 4,111/17,097 (red) +0 (details)
	Average Offensive Ability: 21,153 (details)	Average Defensive Ability: 21,104 (details)
	Average Magical Ability:	Average Resistance

28,280 (details) Ability: 28,107 (details)

Average Speed Ability: 25,021 (details)

Skills:

[HP Ultra-Fast Recovery LV 6]	[Height of Occultism]	[Magic Divinity LV 7]	[Magic Power Conferment LV 10]
[Magic Conferment LV 2]	[Magic Power Super-Attack LV 2]	[SP Rapid Recovery LV 10]	[SP Minimized Consumption LV 10]
[Destruction Super-Enhancement LV 6]	[Cutting Super-Enhancement LV 7]	[Piercing Super-Enhancement LV 4]	[Piercing Super-Enhancement LV 6]
[Impact Super-Enhancement LV 6]	[Status Condition Super-Enhancement LV 10]	[Battle Divinity LV 10]	[Energy Conferment LV 10]
[Ability Conferment LV 7]	[Energy Super-Attack LV 4]	[Divine Dragon Power LV 7]	[Dragon Barrier LV 2]
[Deadly Poison Attack LV 10]	[Enhanced Paralysis Attack LV 10]	[Rot Attack LV 6]	[Heretic Attack LV 8]
[Poison Synthesis LV 10]	[Medicine Synthesis LV 10]	[Thread Genius LV 10]	[Divine Thread Weaving]
[Thread Control LV 10]	[Psychokinesis LV 7]	[Throw LV 10]	[Expel LV 10]
[Dimensional Maneuvering LV 10]	[Swim LV 2]	[Kin Control LV 10]	[Egg-Laying LV 10]
[Concentration LV 10]	[Thought Super-Acceleration LV 3]	[Future Sight LV 3]	[Parallel Thinking LV 9]
[High-Speed Processing LV 10]	[Hit LV 10]	[Evasion LV 10]	[Probability Super-Correction LV 10]
[Stealth LV 10]	[Concealment LV 2]	[Silence LV 10]	[Odorless LV 3]

[Emperor] [Conviction] [Hades] [Corruption]

[Immortality] [Heresy Magic LV 10] [Wind Magic LV 10] [Gale Magic LV 1]

[Earth Magic LV 10] [Terrain Magic LV 3] [Shadow Magic LV 10] [Dark Magic LV 10]

[Black Magic LV 7] [Poison Magic LV 10] [Healing Magic LV 10] [Spatial Magic LV 10]

[Dimensional Magic LV 7] [Abyss Magic LV 10] [Demon Lord LV 8] [Perseverance]

[Pride] [Rage] [Usurp] [Gluttony]

[Sloth] [Wisdom] [Destruction Super-Resistance LV 5] [Impact Nullification]

[Cutting Super-Resistance LV 5] [Piercing Super-Resistance LV 5] [Shock Super-Resistance LV 5] [Flame Resistance LV 8]

[Flood Resistance LV 1] [Gale Resistance LV 4] [Terrain Resistance LV 5] [Bolt Resistance LV 1]

[Holy Light Resistance LV 9] [Dark Resistance LV 6] [Heavy Super-Resistance LV 4] [Status Condition Nullification]

[Acid Super-Resistance LV 7] [Rot Super-Resistance LV 5] [Faint Resistance LV 8] [Fear Super-Resistance LV 2]

[Heresy Nullification] [Pain Nullification] [Suffering Nullification] [Night Vision LV 10]

[Long-Distance Vision LV 1] [Jinx Evil Eye LV 8] [Inert Evil Eye LV 7] [Repellent Evil Eye LV 5]

[Annihilating Evil Eye LV 5] [Five Senses Super-Enhancement LV 10] [Perception Expansion LV 8] [Divinity Expansion LV 9]

[Celestial Power] [Ultimate Life LV 10] [Ultimate Movement LV 10] [Fortune LV 10]

[Fortitude LV 10] [Stronghold LV 10] [Skanda LV 10] [Taboo LV 10]

[n% I = W]

Skill Points: 164,500

Titles:

[Foul Feeder]	[Kin Eater]	[Assassin]	[Monster Slayer]
[Poison Technique User]	[Thread User]	[Merciless]	[Monster Slaughterer]
[Ruler of Pride]	[Ruler of Perseverance]	[Ruler of Wisdom]	[Wyrm Slayer]
[Fearbringer]	[Dragon Slayer]	[Ruler of Sloth]	[Monster Calamity]
[Champion]			

>

W…h…a…t?

Something's wrong with my stats.

Sure, they were starting to get a little high to match the power creep that's been going on with my enemies lately, but they weren't anywhere near this.

On top of that, I got some weird skills, and they've all gone up a bunch of levels and stuff.

I definitely never had Dragon Barrier, Divine Thread Weaving, Egg-Laying, or anything like that. Did I copy them from Mother somehow?

A bunch of my skills even got maxed out.

Just when I was almost done for, I've suddenly gotten a huge power-up.

I thought that only happened to *shonen* manga protagonists?

Does that mean I'm a protagonist now, too?

〖Hey, I know you're confused and all, but we should probably finish Mother off now.〗

Former magic brain number one brings me back to reality, so I look to where Mother landed.

There, I see that she's been heavily damaged by my breath attack.

She's trying to get to her feet, but her legs can't seem to support her huge weight anymore.

It looks like she can't even stand up now.

She was such an overwhelming force, and now she's lying frailly on the ground.

A wounded mother whose own child stole her power away.

Of course, it's not as if I actually have a motherly image of her at all.

I've been calling her Mother this entire time, but I don't think of her as my parent.

All I associate with her is the fear I felt the first time I saw her.

Maybe I'm just a bad daughter, like I was in my previous life.

That reminds me, I wonder how my parents from my old world are doing?

The fact that I can't even remember their faces anymore probably reflects poorly on me.

I'm sure even detached parents like mine would think so.

Well, I should probably say a few words for my parent in this life, at least.

Mother, you were amazing.

Your stats were impressive, of course, but what's really amazing is how you were able to corner me in your weakened state.

I'll never again let my guard down because an opponent seems weaker than I am. It'll be your first and last lesson to me, Mother.

Good-bye.

My Parallel Minds unleash their magic in unison.

Thus, the most powerful creature in the Great Elroe Labyrinth breathes her last.

I successfully overthrew Mother.

Consequently, the Parallel Minds that were fighting her soul have come back to me.

At the same time, Mother's control over me vanishes completely, and the faint connection I felt before disappears.

In other words, there's no longer anyone trying to control me, and my link to the network of spider souls that centered around Mother is gone.

The Demon Lord was the real origin of this network, but since I was on the fringes, connecting to her via Mother, that means I'm cut off from the Demon Lord now.

The problem is, that means I can't attack her soul with my Parallel Minds like I did with Mother.

Without a connection, I can't send Parallel Minds over to her.

Even with my stats and skills raised by absorbing Mother's power, I'm still far from approaching the Demon Lord's level.

I mean, her stats averaged around 90,000.

Sure, I got a lot stronger just now, but I'm nowhere near closing that gap.

And that's definitely not the kind of difference I can make up for with any amount of traps.

I don't know what the Demon Lord is going to do now that I've defeated Mother and so many of her other minions.

If she's going to keep coming after me, I'll have to fight her eventually.

To be honest, I'd rather not fight that monstrosity. I kinda wish she'd just leave me alone…

As I mull all this over, former magic brain number one speaks up.

《Hey, main body, you got a sec?》

Yeah, what's up?

《C'mon. You haven't noticed yet?》

Hmm?

After thinking for a moment, it occurs to me.

The number of Parallel Minds that came back doesn't add up.

There's one missing.

〖See, former body brain kinda, uh…headed out.〗

Out? To where?

〖Over to the Demon Lord.〗

Come again?

〖I mean, when we still had the connection between Mother and the Demon Lord, body brain decided to use it to go attack her.〗

Say what?!

Wait, but isn't my connection to the Demon Lord gone now?

Huh? Is former body brain gonna be able to come back?

〖Beats me.〗

Um, I'm pretty sure she can't, right?

'Cause, like, the connection is gone now.

〖Yeah, I guess.〗

…Farewell, former body brain.

I'll never forget you.

Looks like I'm down one Parallel Mind.

Thanks to Heresy Nullification, I don't think former body brain will be destroyed.

But I don't think there's any way to get her back now that she's attached to the Demon Lord and cut off from me, either.

Or whether that'll ever be possible.

I guess maybe she might come back if I defeat the Demon Lord, but I wouldn't hold my breath.

Because I don't think I'll ever be able to do that.

Sorry, former body brain, but when it comes to the Demon Lord, I'm sticking to the tried-and-true strategy of running like hell.

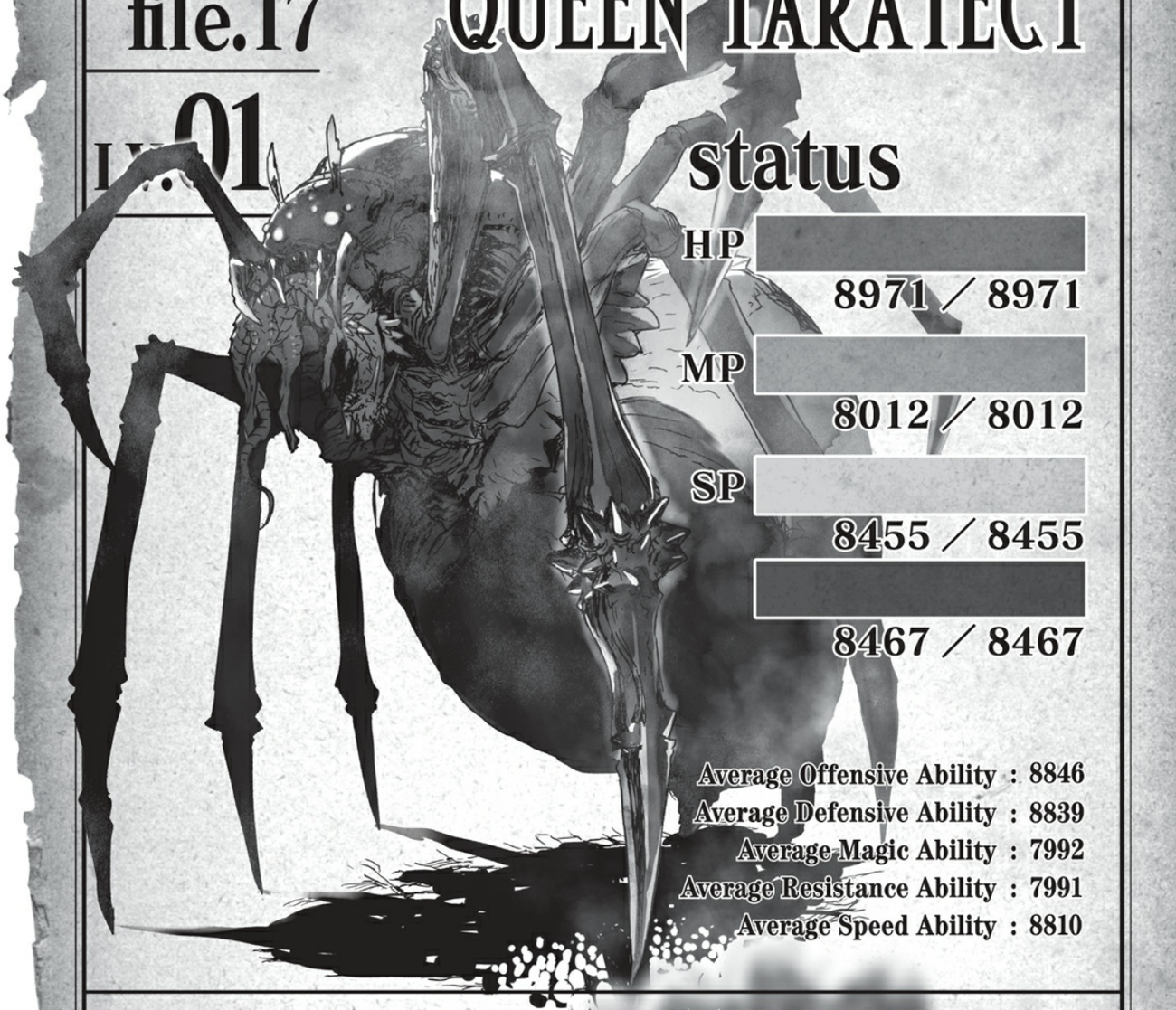
Now that I've absorbed all that power from Mother, I could even defeat a puppet spider in a fair fight, no problem. As long as I'm careful about the Demon Lord, I think I'll be just fine.

But don't worry—I'm not gonna let my guard down again.

Monster Encyclopedia

file.17

QUEEN TARATECT



status

HP 8971 / 8971

MP 8012 / 8012

SP 8455 / 8455

8467 / 8467

Average Offensive Ability : 8846
Average Defensive Ability : 8839
Average Magic Ability : 7992
Average Resistance Ability : 7991
Average Speed Ability : 8810

skill

[HP Rapid Recovery LV 9] [MP Rapid Recovery LV 1] [MP Minimized Consumption LV 1] [Magic Warfare LV 8] [Magic Power Conferment LV 1] [Magic Attack LV 5] [SP Rapid Recovery LV 8] [SP Minimized Consumption LV 8] [Destruction Super-Enhancement LV 4] [Impact Super-Enhancement LV 4] [Cutting Super-Enhancement LV 3] [Piercing Super-Enhancement LV 5] [Shock Super-Enhancement LV 5] [Status Condition Super-Enhancement LV 10] [Energy Conferment LV 5] [Energy Super-Attack LV 1] [Dragon Power LV 1] [Dragon Barrier LV 1] [Deadly Poison Attack LV 10] [Enhanced Paralysis Attack LV 10] [Heretic Attack LV 3] [Poison Synthesis LV 10] [Medicine Synthesis LV 10] [Thread Genius LV 10] [Divine Thread Weaving] [Thread Control LV 10] [Psychokinesis LV 1] [Throw LV 10] [Expel LV 10] [Dimensional Maneuvering LV 10] [Kin Control LV 10] [Egg-Laying LV 10] [Concentration LV 10] [Evasion LV 10] [Hit LV 10] [Probability Super-Correction LV 10] [Stealth LV 10] [Concealment LV 7] [Silence LV 5] [Emperor] [Heretic Magic LV 10] [Shadow Magic LV 10] [Dark Magic LV 8] [Poison Magic LV 10] [Healing Magic LV 4] [Demon Lord LV 1] [Satiation LV 10] [Destruction Super-Resistance LV 1] [Impact Super-Resistance LV 9] [Cutting Super-Resistance LV 1] [Piercing Super-Resistance LV 1] [Shock Super-Resistance LV 1] [Fire Resistance LV 8] [Water Resistance LV 5] [Wind Resistance LV 5] [Earth Resistance LV 6] [Lightning Resistance LV 5] [Light Resistance LV 7] [Dark Resistance LV 1] [Heavy Resistance LV 7] [Status Condition Nullification] [Acid Super-Resistance LV 1] [Rot Resistance LV 2] [Faint Resistance LV 2] [Fear Resistance LV 3] [Heresy Resistance LV 3] [Pain Nullification] [Suffering Nullification] [Night Vision LV 10] [Clairvoyance LV 6] [Five Senses Super-Enhancement LV 10] [Perception Expansion LV 5] [Ultimate Life LV 10] [Ultimate Magic LV 10] [Ultimate Movement LV 10] [Fortune LV 10] [Fortitude LV 10] [Stronghold LV 10] [Deva LV 10] [Sanctum LV 10] [Skanda LV 10] [Taboo LV 10]

A queen that reigns as the most powerful of spider monsters. Boasting a size so large that it can cause destruction just by walking, it is said to be powerful enough that even a single individual can destroy an entire country. Even an army cannot defeat a queen taratect, yet the queen often uses Egg-Laying to increase the number of its minions. There are only five in the entire world, each of them considered the most powerful monster in its area. A legendary-class monster that cannot be defeated by humans.



Demon Lord

A mysterious monster that revived itself even though I was sure I killed it.

The panic of being backed into a corner by a creature that should have been much weaker than I am.

And then…

I awaken from my nap with a start.

Dozing off in a carriage as we march toward the elf village is a pretty nice luxury, if I do say so myself.

Though it's not exactly a typical carriage.

To be clear, I'm riding in a basket on the back of a giant spider.

My steed of choice is an arch taratect.

Riding around on a monster as powerful as a dragon is yet another perk of being me.

Thanks to this thing, none of the soldiers try to approach me.

In fact, they couldn't even if they tried.

Demons may have higher stats than humans, but they still know better than to casually approach a dragon-class monster for no good reason.

I'm sure they wouldn't want to even if they had one.

So I get to enjoy a comfortable journey without being bothered by the outside world.

Little Miss White is in the carriage with me, but as long as I don't speak to her, she's not going to say a word. It's nice and quiet.

I peer at White’s face, directly across from me.

Her eyes are closed, and she’s sitting perfectly still.

Since she has her eyes closed most of the time, I can’t tell if she’s sleeping or not.

She could probably fall asleep standing up and no one would even notice, I think absently.

She might look fragile, but she’s strong enough to kill a hero without breaking a sweat. You can’t judge people by their appearances.

Well, I guess you could say the same thing about me.

I wonder if all these pointless thoughts mean I’m actually nervous for once?

We’ve finally arrived, after all.

Looking out the window, I see a truly ridiculous amount of trees and plants.

This is the Great Garam Forest, the home of the elves.

My army has been marching through it for a while.

Our goal, of course, is the elf village.

The imperial army has already arrived there.

They’re at a standstill right now because of the barrier that protects the village, but soon that barrier will be gone.

And then the imperial army will attack the elf village.

After that, we can take our sweet time showing up.

Once the elves have lost their precious barrier and are flying into a panic as the imperial army attacks them, we’ll slide in from the side and greet them with a finishing blow.

As I imagine it, my lips automatically curl into a smile.

We’ve finally made it.

My longtime wish is going to be fulfilled.

My wish to exterminate the elves once and for all, that is.

Now I can get revenge on them for all the sneaking around they've been doing behind the scenes since forever ago.

Once I had my watchful queen taratect help the imperial army's advance, I put her in position for a pincer attack on the elves.

Soon, they'll taste the triple threat of the imperial army, the demon army, and the queen taratect all at once.

What will their screaming and crying faces look like?

Just thinking about it gives me a thrill.

"I can't wait."

Without meaning to, I murmur my thoughts out loud.

Overhearing this, White turns toward me.

Her eyes are still closed, but I can tell she's looking at me.

"You can rampage as much as you like this time, okay, White? I'll definitely be going all out!"

I know it's childish to get excited, but I can't help it.

"Demon Lord," White says quietly.

She sounds a little worried, so I decide to reassure her.

"I told you—it'll be fine. I'm not going to touch those reincarnations. My only target is the elves, remember? I made sure all the soldiers know that, too. Don't worry, okay?"

My goal here is to wipe out the elves.

Honestly, I don't care either way about the reincarnations.

From what I've heard, the reincarnation who's the new hero and his friends have shown up in the village, but they're all just small fry as far as I'm concerned.

If they get in my way, I'll just knock them out without killing them, easy.

Their presence doesn't change a thing.

The elf village is going to be destroyed no matter what those reincarnations

do.

And that’s a fact.

“Ahh, I can’t wait…”

Finally, I get to kill you.

Just you wait, Potimas Harrifenas.



CHIEF OF THE ELVES

“Lord Potimas, we’ve confirmed another army approaching behind the imperial army.”

“I know.”

“You were already aware of this?”

“Of course. The empire’s little army is nothing but an opening act.”

“Does that mean you know the identity of the other army, Lord Potimas?”

“Yes. It’s the current Demon Lord’s army.”

“The Demon Lord’s army?! Why would they be in human territory?!”

“Why, indeed. It’s likely the work of a certain sly old schemer.”

“Aha…”

“At any rate, please prepare the Gloria.”

“Yes, sir. What operation ratio would you prefer?”

“All of it.”

“Sir?”

“Activate all of it.”

“But, sir, that would be—”

“If they’re attacking us with all their strength, it’s only polite to give them an equal reception. We must not hold anything back. We shall intercept them with the full strength of the elves.”

“You do not think that is excessive?”

“I think it will be just enough.”

“Shall we deploy the Gloria behind the general elf defense force, then?”

“Indeed.”

“What about the hero and the other reincarnations?”

“Let them do as they please. Now that things have come this far, I have no further use for them. It is no business of mine where they choose to die.”

“I’ll relay your commands to the defense force, then.”

“Please do. It’s about time to settle the grudge between that creature and me. It would be foolish of me to miss this chance now that she’s come right to my doorstep. Exterminate them without allowing any chance for escape.”

“Yes, sir. Understood.”

“Come, then, you foolish girl who drew the unfortunate lot of Demon Lord. Perhaps death will prove that you were mistaken in assuming that someone who can only watch in silence as everything they have rots away would be able to challenge the likes of me.”

Final Chapter FIRST ENCOUNTER

After defeating Mother, I've been wandering around outside while avoiding the Demon Lord.

I've eliminated most of Mother's spider army in the Great Elroe Labyrinth.

All that remains now is the Demon Lord and her four puppet spiders.

She seems to have judged it too dangerous to let the puppet spiders act on their own. Instead she's keeping them with her.

Thanks to that, she has to match her speed to the puppet spiders', making it harder for her to catch up to me.

In fact, it seems like I've lost her.

I've expanded my range wide enough that there's not much she can do.

I keep moving farther and farther away from the Demon Lord.

And now I've started traveling on a main road.

I've been avoiding any human roads, villages, towns, and the like to try to keep from being spotted, but there must be a city close by or something. There are so many roads around now that I can't avoid them anymore.

I'm just traveling along one of the roads while trying to keep away from human eyes.

If I keep traveling this way, I feel like I'm gonna run into a big town or something, but my only other option is to travel in the direction of the Demon Lord.

And that's no good.

My only choice is to resign myself to the possibility of being spotted in order

to keep traveling farther away from the Demon Lord.

Luckily, there hasn't been much traffic, letting me travel without being seen by humans for a while, but it looks like I've hit the limit on that.

There's a carriage up ahead.

I've finally crossed paths with some humans. Unfortunately.

Also, not that this matters, but regular old horses are drawing along the carriage.

Since this is a fantasy world and all, I wouldn't have been surprised to see wyrms or something, but this is so ordinary that it's almost a letdown.

Anyway, as I peek curiously at the carriage, I notice that something seems off.

Hmm? Hmmmm?

What are you guys up to?

Oh, I see.

A robbery.

They're being attacked, huh?

I knew I'd run into humans sooner or later, but I never would've guessed that my first encounter would be the scene of a fight with some robbers.

Some escort-looking people are fighting the robber-looking guys.

There are four escorts and six robbers.

Hmm. In my opinion, both sides seem to be evenly matched, but if we're going strictly off numbers, then the robbers have the advantage.

Oh, one of the guards went down.

What's my play here?

I don't really wanna get involved.

I'm trying to avoid being seen, especially if I want to keep off the Demon Lord's radar.

Still, if I just ignore people being attacked right before my eyes, I'm gonna feel

bad about it later.

I'm not trying to be an ally of justice or whatever; it's just a matter of not ruining my mood.

I guess maybe I still have a little bit of my basic moral compass from my previous life.

At the same time, though, my heart says the whole thing seems like a pain.

Like, why should I have to save some stupid humans anyway?

Not to mention, even if I save them, I'm still technically a monster.

What if I rescue them and they turn around and try to attack me?

I mean, I'm not gonna let it slide if they pull something like that, but I'm pretty sure that would defeat the purpose of rescuing them in the first place.

Maybe I should just wait till all the carriage people get killed and then go in and kill the thieves?

Like, I'm definitely gonna kill those guys either way.

Humans give a ton of EXP, after all.

I don't wanna go around massacring civilians or anything, but it'd be a waste to ignore people like robbers who I can totally get away with killing, right?

I get lots of EXP. I'm more than happy.

Civilians don't have to deal with the robbers anymore. Now they're happy.

See? Aside from the robbers getting killed, everybody's happy.

Those robbers are definitely going down.

And then down the hatch and into my belly.

When I ate those bastard knights who burned my home in the labyrinth, I discovered that humans taste different depending on the individual.

Maybe it was just my imagination, but the better-looking ones seemed to taste better, too.

These butt-ugly robbers probably won't taste great, but they'll still fill my belly one way or another.

Now it’s just a matter of whether to rescue the people in the carriage or not.

I mean, I dunno.

Is it just me, or is there no advantage at all to helping them?

In fact, there are tons of disadvantages.

If I don’t help them, the advantage is that there won’t be any eyewitnesses to my existence, plus I’ll get more food.

The disadvantage is that I’m probably gonna feel bad about it.

Hmm, hmm, hmm.

Ugh…

Fiiiine.

I don’t really feel like it, but I guess I’ll help them.

Objectively, it’d be more advantageous not to help them, but I gotta follow my heart at times like these.

It’d be annoying to regret it later anyway.

Here we go.

The robbers are so focused on their battle with the guards that they don’t even notice my approach.

Works for me.

The big guy in the middle is probably their leader, I guess.

His stats are the highest, anyway.

I zip around behind him, then stab his wide-open back with one of my scythes.

The scythe runs through his body, skewering his heart.

Oh, and of course I had my deadly poison on it, too. He definitely died instantly.

When I pull the scythe back out, the robber’s body crumples to the ground.

The other two are too stunned to figure out what’s happening, so I whip my

scythes to either side.

Boom, sliced ’em both in two.

Now only half the robbers are left.

I use Earth Magic to shoot one of the three right in the head.

Y’know, I think I’m pretty well suited to Earth Magic.

I’ve gotten way better at it than Wind Magic, which I picked up at about the same time.

Anyway, four down, two to go.

One of the men tries to run.

Tough luck, pal.

I’ve already got you tied up in my thread.

With the last two thieves immobilized, I turn my Evil Eyes on them.

Their HP, MP, and SP get sucked away in seconds, and down they go.

That’s a wrap, people.

If I were a prince or a knight or whatever, this is the part where I’d go, *Are you hurt, milady?* and the young lady inside the carriage would be all, *Oh, I’m so lucky you just happened to be there when those awful men attacked me!* and so on and so forth.

Ew. Gag.

White knights are the worst.

Ugh. All right, enough going off on tangents.

I beat the thieves.

I rescued the carriage.

The guards are pointing their swords at me.

And here we are.

Well, well.

I knew it.

I knew this would happen.

If anything, I guess I'm glad they didn't just attack me right away.

It's not that they're just too scared of me to move.

I'm sure they're really nice people, so they're very suspicious but reluctant to attack someone who just saved their lives.

Like I said. It's not 'cause they're too scared of me to move.

It's not, okay?

Hmm?

Well, look at that. The first guy who went down is actually still alive.

Ugh, since I'm in it this far, I guess I might as well help him, too.

I approach the fallen human.

As soon as I move even a little, the other guards make a big deal of backing far away.

…I'm just gonna pretend I didn't notice that.

Activate Healing Magic.

The collapsed guard's wounds heal up in an instant.

Okay. With that, he's probably not gonna die.

Actually, now that I look at him, this guy's dressed more like a butler than a guard.

You were trying to protect your master even though you're not trained for combat?

Aw, how nice.

Aside from the guards, the lady watching nervously from inside the carriage looks pretty surprised, too.

Considering that a monster just rescued her from thieves and is now using Healing Magic on one of her entourage, I guess that's a reasonable reaction.

Whew. All right, I'm done here.

I guess I'll just make a super-cool exit, since it'd be awkward to gather up the robbers' bodies in front of everyone.

Wait, the lady is bustling out of the carriage now.

Her guards all protest, holding her back.

But I don't care about that anymore.

My eyes are fixed on what the lady is holding in her arms.

<Human vampire LV 1 Name: Sophia Keren

Status:

HP: 11/11 (green) (details) MP: 35/35 (blue) (details)

SP: 12/12 (yellow) (details) : 12/12 (red) (details)

Average Offensive Ability: 9 (details) Average Defensive Ability: 8 (details)

Average Magical Ability: 32 (details) Average Resistance Ability: 33 (details)

Average Speed Ability: 8 (details)

Skills:

[Vampire LV 1] [Immortality LV 1] [HP Auto-Recovery LV 1] [Magic Power Perception LV 3]

[Magic Power Operation LV 3] [Night Vision LV 1] [Five Senses Enhancement LV 1] [n% I = W]

Skill Points: 75,000

Titles:

[Vampire] [Progenitor]

>

The lady is cradling a baby.

And its Appraisal results are something else.

I mean…could I be wrong?

There's so much going on here that I don't know where to start, y'know?

I mean, she's a vampire, she's got a ton of skill points, and she's got a second name kinda displayed under the first one…

Ahh, I get it.

Is this baby what I think it is?

I mean, come on. I knew the moment a super-Japanese name like Shouko Negishi popped up in her Appraisal results.

This child is a reincarnation, just like me.

That was the day I first met a fellow reincarnation in this world.



TIMELINE KINGDOM HISTORY

Year 798	Ronandt becomes the youngest head court mage of the Renxandt Empire in history.
Year 801	Meicis the hero is killed in battle at Fort Kusorion.
	Darresmeig is appointed as the new hero.
Year 803	Darresmeig the hero defeats Demon Lord Atomos.
Year 804	Darresmeig the hero disappears.
Year 807	Sword-King Leigar abdicates the throne of the Renxandt Empire and disappears.
	Largis becomes the new sword-king. Ronandt becomes his adviser.
Year 829	Sirius becomes king of Analeit Kingdom.
Year 832	The first prince of Analeit Kingdom, Cylis, is born to the true queen.
Year 833	The first princess of Analeit Kingdom, Leiresia, is born to the king's first concubine.
Year 834	The second prince of Analeit Kingdom, Julius, is born to the king's third concubine.
Year 837	The third prince of Analeit Kingdom, Leston, is born to the king's second concubine.
Year 840	The second prince, Julius, becomes the hero.
	The previous hero, Darresmeig, is thus assumed dead.
	An unusual young taratect individual is sighted in the Great Elroe Labyrinth. A wyrm egg and spider thread are collected from its nest and presented to the royal family.

Increase in demon activity.

Year 841 The fourth prince of Analeit Kingdom, Schlain, is born to the king's third concubine.

The second princess of Analeit Kingdom, Suresia, is born to the true queen.

The first child of Duke Anabald, Karnatia, is born.

The first prince of the Renxandt Empire, Hugo, is born.

The king's third concubine passes away.

The empire army, led by Ronandt, encounters the "Nightmare of the Labyrinth" in the Great Elroe Labyrinth.

The Nightmare of the Labyrinth and a queen taratect emerge from the Great Elroe Labyrinth.

Ronandt temporarily disappears.

Year 842 The Nightmare of the Labyrinth appears in Sariella.

The Sariella and Ohts regions go to war. The empire and the Followers of the Word of God support Ohts.

Julius the hero battles the Nightmare of the Labyrinth and escapes with his life thanks to Ronandt's rescue.

Julius the hero temporarily becomes Ronandt's pupil.

Kidnapping and slave trading occur successively in various locations.

Year 843 The Nightmare's Vestiges are identified in the Great Elroe Labyrinth.

Year 844 The first princess, Leiresia, marries the first prince of the Teresent Kingdom and studies abroad there.

Year 845 The Sword Demon appears in the empire.

Ronandt successfully drives the Sword Demon away.

Year 846 The Word of God religion exposes a large-scale human trafficking organization.

As a result of this incident, Julius the hero adds Jeskan and Hawkin to his party.

Year 847 Schlain, Suresia, and Karnatia undergo the Appraisal ceremony.

Year 848 Feirune hatches from the earth wyrm egg.

Year 850 Potimas, the chief of the elves, visits the kingdom as a friendship ambassador.

Potimas's daughter Filimøs studies abroad in the kingdom.

Julius the hero is caught in a demon trap and attacked but manages to escape.

Year 851 Schlain, Suresia, Karnatia, and Filimøs enter the royal academy.

The empire prince Hugo and the future saint Yurin make contact with them.

Julius the hero defeats one Nightmare's Vestige in the Great Elroe Labyrinth.

Prince Hugo attempts to assassinate Schlain.

An earth wyrm attacks the royal academy.

Year 856 The great human-demon war begins.

Julius the hero is killed in battle.

A coup d'état occurs in the Analeit Kingdom.

King Sirius passes away.

The fourth prince, Schlain, flees with fellow collaborator the third prince, Leston.

The Word of God announces Prince Hugo of the Renxandt Empire as the new hero.

At the same time, the second princess, Suresia, is announced as Hugo’s fiancée.

The empire declares war on the elves for participating in the kingdom’s coup d’état and begins raising an army.

The empire army and the Demon Lord’s army invade the elf village.

AFTERWORD

To readers old and new, hello! I'm Okina Baba.

Although I doubt there are any newcomers picking up the fourth volume.

That'd be like starting with the hardest member of the Elite Four, y'know?

Stop that! Put this down and start with the weakest member, aka Volume 1!

This is an ongoing series, so you're not going to understand if you start with Volume 4!

The main topic of this volume is Mother, whose presence has been lurking since all the way back in Volume 1.

Are there any other novels where the first illustration is not the protagonist but the protagonist's giant mother?

No, probably not!

Normally, the first illustration would be either the hero or a cute heroine, but instead, boom! Giant spider!

And when she reappeared in Volume 3, she once again stole the spotlight in the very first illustration.

Yes, Mother is the prima donna who took over not one but two major illustrations in the past.

Don't give up, protagonist!

You're still winning in terms of total number of illustrations, protagonist!

There's a high percentage of illustrations that don't feature humans, but I guess that's inevitable given the nature of the story.

I mean, every one of the first three volumes featured nonhuman characters across the board.

Well, the protagonist's not human, so that's how the cookie crumbles!

I'm so impressed with Tsukasa Kiryu for dealing with all that. Don't worry—there are plenty of humans in Volume 4!

This time around, the book features a story that wasn't in the web version.

The amount of new material I write for each volume has only gone up since Volume 1, and now I've finally reached the point where 90 percent of the book is brand new.

If I keep this up, Volume 5 and onward will all be 100 percent new material!

Unforgivable! That will never pass muster!

Speaking of new material, I also wrote a new short story.

Kadokawa Books is conducting a survey to commemorate its first anniversary, and it's set up that if you fill out the survey (http://kadokawabooks.jp), you can read the short story.

Please participate if you'd like to read it.

Now on to the thank-yous.

To Tsukasa Kiryu, who always draws the most incredible illustrations for this humble nonhuman-character-filled series.

To Asahiro Kakashi, who also does an amazing job of drawing all those nonhuman characters in the manga adaptation.

To my editor K and everyone else who was involved in bringing this book into the world.

And to everyone who has picked up this book.

Thank you all very much.

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